

AT THE SIGN OF
THE BLUE MOON

D.B. WYNDHAM LEWIS



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AT THE SIGN OF THE BLUE MOON

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A t the Sign *of the* Blue Moon

By
D. B. Wyndham Lewis



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TO
ELIJAH GUMBLE, ESQ.

SIR,
Every liberal motive and every respectable emotion that can actuate an Author in the dedication of his labours, concur in directing me to You, as the person to whom the following Work should be most fitly inscribed.

For a long time now I have been an admirer of those qualities and talents which find in You their illustrious exemplar. Your genius in that Art of Agriculture which You have so long adorned with unblemished fame, your acknowledged skill alike with the hayfork and the table-knife, your reserved and Jove-like demeanour, the profuse luxuriance of that capillary grove which fringes and enshrines the major part of your features, the gracious elliptical curve of your nether limbs, the ligneous immobility of your countenance, the dreadful and reverberating sonority of invective which has long made your farm a centre of pilgrimage for the pious, the thoughtful, the philosophical, and the ingenuous; all

these qualities I can ascribe to You without writhing under the shameful accusation of servility or panting under the undeserved attribution of interest.

You are doubtless aware of the apparition of Pan in Monsieur *Molière's* ballet in *Le Malade Imaginaire*; and I need hardly remind You that the Sylvan God, surrounded by persons of both sexes engaged in the agricultural industry, is attended by six fauns and ushered in by a dance to a *ritournelle*, a species of activity which I believe is no longer general in rural circles. The words uttered by Pan, as being most exquisitely applicable to You, I will here repeat :

PAN, suivy de six faunes

Laissez, laissez, bergers, ce dessein téméraire ;

Hé ! que voulez-vous faire ?

Chanter sur vos chalumeaux

Ce qu'Apollon sur sa lyre,

Avec ses chants les plus beaux,

N'entreprendroit pas de dire ? . . .

Pour chanter de LOUIS l'intrepide courage,

Il n'est point assez docte voix,

Point de mots assez grands pour en tracer l'image.

Merely substituting for LOUIS the name of GUMBLE, and forbearing to add those apothegms and attributes from Seneca, Vergil, and other ancient and moral writers, which could but lend a meretricious lustre to your

name, even if, as is not the case, I could remember them correctly without access to the works of Mr. Loeb,

I am, Sir,

Your most obliged and faithful
humble servant,

D. B. WYNDHAM LEWIS.

LONDON, *November* 1924.

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“I thought when I went first to dwell in the Country, that without doubt I should have met there with the Simplicity of the old Poeticall Golden Age; I thought to have found no Inhabitants there, but such as the Shepherds of Sir *Phil. Sidney* in *Arcadia*, or of Monsieur *d’Urfé* upon the banks of *Lignon*; and began to confider with myself, which way I might recommend no less to Posterity the Happinels and Innocence of the Men of *Chertsea*; but to confes the Truth, I perceived quickly, by infallible Demonstrations, that I was still in old *England*.”—COWLEY.

AT THE SIGN OF THE BLUE MOON

I

SOME INTRODUCTIONS

MOST illustrious good tosspots, and you, most precious gouty ones, there is in the little old town of Chinon, on the River Vienne, in Touraine, a house from whose upper window the great François Rabelais fished for lamprey in the year 1504. In those days the town of Chinon, as you may see from old engravings, was a little forest of *tourelles* and spires ; and in place of the long tree-fringed promenade by the river there was a woundy great thick wall round the town, and another round the castle above, from whose towers the guards might sweep with their eyes the green Tourainian plain and so order the boiling lead in good time against the arrival of the enemy, who would toil gasping up the hill only to receive it piping hot on their skulls. Much to their annoyance !

In this excellent, compact little town, then, sat Rabelais angling for lamprey in the wide,

placid Vienne, which flows dreamily past like the Thames at Datchet. They have marked the house with a signboard in blue and gold, to the comfort and enlargement of all true men and the downcasting, bafflement, and confusion of pedants, fools, and those who deny the verities. Among whom was once Professor Bodger, a ripe (but too-whiskered) scholar whom you shall very soon know.

This Professor was to have addressed the Sorbonne in Paris on the Nature and Origin of Laughter ; to which end he had prepared and assimilated a whole farrago of arid, cranky, analytical, tedious, philosophical-psychological, anthropological-metabiological, metagrobolising stuff, derived from Bergson and Heaven knows whom else. But before the day of his lecture I got the Professor away into Touraine, down to Chinon, and showed him this little old house in the Rue de la Lamproie, this authentic and undeniable relic of the Father of Mirth, and also the Painted Cave where Pantagruel, as he says in the Fifth Book, drank *maints verres de vin frais*. After gazing at this venerable spot for a time the Professor (for some divine sort of jollity had got hold of him and was shaking him) burst into eldritch laughter, like the creaking of a badly oiled cart-wheel ; and the very next day, in full Sorbonne, where all the gravest flat-capped doctors were

assembled to hear him, Professor Bodger, rising to address them, began instead to dance very gravely a Coranto on the table, holding wide the skirts of his frock-coat and smiling through his glasses in an ineffable manner. And when he had finished a learned scholar arose and asked him: "But what is your position?" Whereat, with a sudden bellow of laughter, Professor Bodger, replying in a trumpet voice:

"THIS IS MY POSITION!"

suddenly stood on his head and remained there, waving his elastic boots in the air and emitting loud roars of ecstasy through his whiskers. Whereupon the Sorbonne, in full conclave, decided to award the Professor a Doctorial Degree, *honoris causa*, for this final, full, and satisfying pronouncement of his, the like of which had never before nor has since been made in any of the Schools. Which was done, under sign and seal, and everybody went to dinner.

Readers of the Letters of Zogitoff (since we are still meditating on this fruitful subject of Mirth) will remember that when the great Russian dramatist was writing his *Six Corpses in Search of a Mortuary* he underwent severe mental anguish, extending over a considerable

period. His daughter Sonia, in a letter to Mushkin, the novelist, records the horror of the family when Zogitoff, at lunch one day in November 1874, suddenly burst into a hollow laugh.

“We immediately” (writes Sonia) “rushed to dear papa’s assistance, imploring him to recollect himself. What a dreadful scene, my dear friend! Papa appeared feverish and several times dipped his brow into a bowl of cabbage soup with a low groan. Mamma and I were quite distracted, and begged him to explain his laugh. But his only reply was to place his ears under the samovar with a piercing cry and run boiling water over them till they were quite red. Then he rushed from the room, where we stayed moaning for some time.”

Zogitoff himself, in a letter to Gushkin, the poet, clears up the distressing incident.

“NIJNI-NOVGOROD, *November 26.*—You will have heard the story of my shame from Sonia. Can you forgive me? I was unstrung. The cause of that laugh on November 20 was this. I had been working late on *Six Corpses* in my little summer-house under our melancholy sky. Late at night I heard an old peasant moodily beating his wife to death, and coffin-shaped clouds drifted wearily across the sky. Notwithstanding these ideal conditions I was

troubled with vague dreams, and on coming down to lunch next day a comic thought persistently obtruded itself on my mind. This thought was, 'Why not let the bones in Act II rattle a little?'—and to my dismay I found myself bursting into a laugh at the frivolous idea. Happily the fit soon passed, and I was able to weep for a long time. Forgive me, my friend! I was not normal."

Mr. and Mrs. Struggles, in their biography of Zogitoff, have seen fit to suppress this incident, but every lover of truth will agree that the momentary weakness of a great man does but show his Humanity, and by no means detracts from his Character. Only once, as far as can be ascertained, did the master give way in this manner. On the other hand, he would sometimes moan for days on end while engaged in writing—a fact which undoubtedly explains to some extent his pre-eminence in Russian literature.

But a little gallery of notables waits to be introduced—Professor Dogbody, Miss Ella Eagerley (the talented authoress of *Shouts of Strengthening* and other womanly works), General Bludyer-Briskett, Mr. Elijah Gumble, the agriculturist. Like Professor Bodger, Professor Dogbody is a Thinker and has been

mistaken at the Zoo for a Ring-Tailed Badger. Like Zogitoff, Miss Eagerley uplifts and does not laugh. High above them all stands Mr. Gumble, the most ferocious agriculturist in captivity. On the Gumble farm the shepherds sing their loves in the shade of groves, as they did in Arcadia ; but ever and anon a muffled roar stills every song, and the ancient man, entirely fringed with whisker and black in the face with rage, is up and at them with a hay-fork. Nevertheless a fair amount of artless pastoral verse is composed on the Gumble estate in Mr. Gumble's absence ; and as to its quality you shall judge for yourself shortly. It may not be always up to the Vergilian standard, but on the other hand what sort of figure do you think Tityrus, Menalcas, Damoetas, and the other Arcadians would have made in the Open Shearing (Gentlemen's Singles), the Mixed Mangel Trimming, the Hedging and Ditching, and the other innocent sports of the countryside to-day ?

We may (or may not) also meet Azrael Murgle, one of the most brilliant young poets of the Left Wing and author of *The Crystal Cabman*, and Ram Chunder Dambore, the Oriental thinker, whose collection of *pensées* beginning :

“ Water is wet, and grass is green, and

the sky is blue. Ponder these things, my brother——”

have caused some critics to compare him with his better-known countryman Tagore. Now and again, perhaps, the serious figure of J. Willowly Poffle, the dramatist (author of *Nelson*, *Wellington*, *John Milton*, *Mrs. Beeton*, *Henry Ford*, and other successful historical dramas), may loom across our scene. So may the redoubtable presence of Emma Lady Snooper, whose artistic and charitable work is so well known and so universally feared. A gallant company !

That, then, as they say in America—and we may add to our gallery Otis P. Boomer, whose name stands for Big Business and One Hundred Per Cent. Efficiency—is the Big Idea. In introducing this little group of representative minds I have to add that I cannot be responsible for any debts contracted by any of them, nor for any opinions advanced by them on Art, Agriculture, Central Heating, Bimetallism, Beekeeping, Glue, or what not. God bless you all.

II

JACK BOBSTAY; OR, AN ADMIRAL'S SHAME

Written after hearing a Lady at a Tea-Fight deplore the dearth of Stories about Sailors "with a really good moral tone."

IN all the Channel Fleet there was no more Popular Sailor than Jack Bobstay, A.B. Tall, Bronzed, and Upright, with the Open Countenance and Clear Blue Eye that bespoke Truth, Candour, and True Piety, he was Beloved by All who Knew Him and, though but an Able Seaman, Universally Respected alike on the Main (or lower) Deck, the Quarter (or higher) Deck, and in the Mizzen-Tops. Bounding along with a Cheerful "Ay, ay," or "Belay there!" with ever a Kind Word for All he Met, whether Ordinary Seamen or Officers of the Highest Rank,* Jack Bobstay was the Friend of the Whole Navy. With his Captain, indeed, he was a Firm Favourite; a Common Esteem and Sympathy drew the

* For he was One of Those who Believed (with the immortal Poet Burns) that "the Rank is but the Guinea Stamp," and that "a Man's a Man for a' that." Even in These Enlightened Days, alas! Arbitrary Social Distinctions make such Free and Manly Greetings Rare in our Navy.

Two together, so that of an Evening they might Often be Seen walking along the deck Side by Side, Admiring the Beauties of the Deep and Exchanging Observations on Matters of Nautical Interest.

“How Inscrutable,” would Bobstay exclaim, Pointing out some Rare Bird or some Aquatic Monster, “are the Designs of Providence !”

“Indeed, indeed they Are,” his Captain would Reply with a Manly and Natural Emotion, laying his Hand Affectionately on the Honest Seaman’s Shoulder. Such a Friendship (not Uncommon in our Navy) became Daily More Firm, and Captain Goodbody (for that was his Name) soon took a Delight in Walking with Bobstay along the Deck after the Day’s Duties were Done, while his Humble Friend recounted some Interesting Incident of his Youth, which had been Passed in the little Village of M——, in L——shire.

“And That,” the Tall, Bronzed Sailor would observe in a Low Voice, “was how I learned Never to Tell Lies, to Cheat, or to Deceive.”

“Tell me About your People,” Captain Goodbody would Reply Gently. And Bobstay would Tell the Captain the Story of his Aunt Martha (a Mrs. Struggles, Now, Unhappily, Deceased), to whom he Owed his Upbringing. On such Occasions the Other Sailors, who

Shared their Captain's Respect and Affection for Jack Bobstay, would Leave their Several Duties to Steal Nearer in Order to Listen ; on Perceiving which Captain Goodbody, with a Natural Benevolence, would not Send them Away Harshly, but would Say " Come, George " (or Ernest or Frederick, as the Case might Be), " do you Sit quietly by Me until Jack has Finished." In this Way many Pleasant and Improving Evenings were Passed on Board H.M.S. *Goop* (for that was the Name of the Ship).

Only one Thing Marred the Pleasure which Jack Bobstay Felt in his Happy and Useful Life in the Navy ; and That was the Presence on board of Admiral Bludyer, whose Flagship it was. The Admiral, indeed, Openly Sneered at the Honest Tar. Jack for his Part felt this Very Keenly, though he would Never Utter a Word against Admiral Bludyer, Contenting himself with a Look of Reproach and Forgiveness as he Bounded Past in the Course of his Naval Duties, which Often Took him into the Admiral's Vicinity. Captain Goodbody, who had Observed this, was Grieved, and Took Occasion to Ask the Admiral the Reason for his Unkindness More than Once ; but to No Purpose. *A String of Oaths was the Only Reply !*

It happened one Day, during the Course of

a Hot Engagement with an Enemy Squadron, that Jack Bobstay, who had been Entrusted by his friend Captain Goodbody with the Steering of the Flagship, Left the Wheel for a Few Moments in Order to Write a short Letter to his Aunt, for whom he Cherished the most Filial Affection. While he was Engaged in this Manner he was Surprised to hear a Loud Voice using Language at which he could Not Repress a Shudder, and looking up he Found that Admiral Bludyer Stood before him, Ordering him, in the most Frightful Phrases, to Return to the Wheel and Steer the Ship a Little to the Left. Rising immediately, and First Carefully Stamping his Letter, Jack Bobstay addressed the Admiral as Follows :—

“ While I am Ready, sir, to Carry out your Wishes with all Reasonable Despatch, I must with the Greatest Regret Decline to do so while you address me in Such Terms as you have just Done.”

As he said These Words a Cannon-Ball suddenly Carried Off his Right Leg. Sinking to his Left Knee he continued, “ Were I to inform my Aunt, to whom I have Just Written, that Such Things were possible in the British Navy, whose Flag has Braved a Thousand Years the Battle and the Breeze, she would Hardly Believe me.”

At that Moment a Cannon-Ball carried away

his Left Leg. Assuming a Prone Position on the Deck he continued, " You will, I know, Sir, Pardon my Refusing to Accede to your Request that I should Take the Wheel. But, Sir, I Cannot Forgo my Principles, even for an Admiral whom I should be Happy to Respect, Were it Not that I Deprecate and Deplore the Laxity of Moral Principle which Permits of Such Language in his Majesty's Ship."

The Heroic Able Seaman was now growing Steadily Weaker. As he Spoke a Third Cannon-ball Carried Off his Right Arm. The Whole Ship's Company were now Gathered Round, Many with Tears in their Eyes; and Some did not Scruple to Hiss the Baffled Admiral, who stood Striving (in Vain) to Avoid their Gaze. " Disgusting!" was a Word heard More than Once. As Captain Goodbody Hurried Up to Shake his Humble Friend's Hand for the Last Time the Dying Sailor spoke Again.

" Why ' Blast ' ? " he whispered. " Why not ' Blow,' or simply ' Bother ' ? "

So saying Jack Bobstay Passed Away; a True British Tar and a Martyr to his Duty, he died Proving that *Principle* is more Precious than Mere *Politeness*, and a Good *Moral Tone* more Desirable than so many Oak-Leaves (however Richly Gilt) round the Hat.

III

THE CASE OF THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

THE smithy at St. Mary Cray, in Kent, which (they say) inspired Mr. Longfellow, that poet, to verse, is about to disappear in the rebuilding of the High Street. The chestnut tree was destroyed some time ago. As for the poem, I recited it the other day to a man who thought it was the work of Mr. Drinkwater. Hence, I think, it is only right to celebrate the passing of the smithy by some brief appreciation of the Poet and his Message. The more awful literary reviews will probably follow my example shortly ; but I doubt if you will understand a word of it. In any case I doubt if they will tell the real story of the Village Blacksmith ; which is all the more reason why we should nip in before them now with some exclusive facts which we owe to the research work of Professor Bodger.

It is well known that Mr. Longfellow was first induced to visit the village by Eliza Cook, the poetess, with whom he was very friendly ; and no doubt when he passed the forge and

saw the honest blacksmith the poet's first thought was "How he perspires!" and his second, "I must make a poem about this." Next day the poet passed in the morning, and observed that the honest fellow had just begun making a horseshoe; and at evening Mr. Longfellow returned and found that the task was finished.

"Something attempted, I see," said the poet heartily. "And something done."

"Ay, ay, sir," returned the honest blacksmith, touching his forelock respectfully. "It do earn a night's repose."

Mr. Longfellow, struck by this thought, paced slowly home. In the morning the idea for a new poem was practically roughed out; and he said as much to his hostess at breakfast.

"Nothing indelicate, Wadsworth, I hope?" said Miss Eliza Cook, smoothing her black bombazine gown with a nervous hand.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Longfellow sharply. "Why?"

"You will remember," said Miss Eliza Cook, blushing faintly, "that I had to take exception to one stanza of your 'Wreck of the Hesperus,' in which you dwelt so regrettably on the physical charms of the skipp——"

"No sugar, thank you," said the poet coldly.

"I am also," said the lady, averting her gaze, "thinking of your 'Excelsior!' where—"

correct me, Wadsworth, if I am wrong—a young female is so far lost to modesty and propriety as to invite a passing stranger of the male sex to lay his head upon her breast.” And Miss Eliza Cook, a warm wave of colour rushing over her neck, hid her head behind the tea-urn.

“Allow me,” said Mr. Longfellow, coughing, “to recite to you a little of my poem.” Whereupon, taking a paper from his pocket, the poet began :

“Under the spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands—”

reading slowly and enunciating each syllable with the greatest care, while Miss Eliza Cook beat time with a teaspoon. She listened with rapt attention, only interrupting to beg him to alter

“His brow is wet with honest sweat ”

to

“Though it transpires he oft perspires ”

which (as she justly observed) was equally euphonious and more genteel. Mr. Longfellow politely agreed, and pretended to alter the line in pencil.

“Otherwise,” said Miss Eliza Cook, “it is a poem of great beauty and profound philosophy, and entirely free from anything objec-

tionable or licentious. Its influence on English poetry will, I think, be incalculable."

"Baby," said Mr. Longfellow simply, "you said it."

He stayed in England a few weeks longer, hoping to be asked to become Poet Laureate, and then went home to America.

As for William Bashing—known in the village as Honest William—the blacksmith, he continued in his modest way to set an example to his fellow men. Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing, onward through life he went; each morning saw one task (and no more) begun, each evening saw its close. He was, however, no longer compelled in church on Sunday mornings to wipe away his tear with a hard, rough hand, for a wealthy sympathiser supplied him with handkerchiefs for that purpose; and although his daughter's habit of singing high and shrill above the rest of the choir lost her many friends in the village, it brought many visitors. As the Vicar observed, in the wonderful scheme of Providence there is no evil without some attendant good.

There came to the village one day, when public interest in Honest William seemed to be slackening, a gentleman with an American accent, who walked briskly to the forge and held a short conversation with its pious occupant.

“What’s it worth?” said Honest William at length.

“Loud sobs,” replied the American gentleman, “two and a half per, sales above 1,000. Soft sobs, one per, sales above 5,000. Twice a Sunday. Double if you mention the poem. Get that?”

Honest William stretched out a large and sinewy hand.

The American gentleman’s contribution was in pamphlet form, and ran :

You Have Heard the Village Blacksmith Sob.

Now Buy the Poem.

Say “Henry Wadsworth Longfellow” to Your Bookseller.

It’s Worth It.

I admit that it has not the pep, the zip, the punch, the verve of modern specimens. But you must remember that publicity was practically in its infancy then. It served its purpose, at any rate, and Mr. Bashing was able to retire much sooner than he expected.

IV

HIGHBROWS' LURE

EVER striving to keep abreast of the latest developments in the contemporary theatre, I have the honour and the pleasure to bring to your notice the work of Lúny Bonéd, a dramatist of the day-after-to-morrow. Bonéd is a Moldavo-Slavonian by birth and writes his plays standing erect, with his forehead resting on the ground ; at the same time revolving at intervals in a clockwise direction and emitting loud hoots. In this way he is best able to express his *ego*. As yet, I believe, the domed brows of London do not know Bonéd's work ; it will soon be our privilege to raise our eyebrows at them with a slight (but scornful) smile.

The short piece we are about to discuss is *Plonk* (in English *Do ?*), which is considered Lúny Bonéd's most brilliant and characteristic work, combining high intellectual and emotional ecstasy with a lambent and sublimated embolism. Very well, then.

PLONK

BY LÚNY BONÉD

THE YOUNG MAN.

THE MILKMAN.

THE OLD WOMAN.

THE STRANGER.

SCENE I.—*A cottage in the Forest of Cszchlpóny. Night. The Old Woman sits with her head in the empty stove, moaning. The Stranger enters.*

THE STRANGER : Is this the house of Stepán Gombony ?

THE YOUNG MAN : No.

THE STRANGER : I beg your pardon.

(Goes out mysteriously.)

A thunderbolt falls and demolishes the hut.

Scene closes.

SCENE II.—*A gorge in the Mizzl Mountains. Dawn. The YOUNG MAN sits on a flat rock by the road, thinking of the Battle of Smacz (A.D. 1355). The MILKMAN comes down the pass.*

THE MILKMAN : Holà !

THE YOUNG MAN (*dully*) : Holà !

THE MILKMAN : I sell milk.

THE YOUNG MAN : Do you ?

Storm. An avalanche sweeps away the MILKMAN.

Scene closes.

SCENE III.—*An inn on the road to Bilj. The OLD WOMAN sits under the table, weeping. The YOUNG MAN enters.*

THE YOUNG MAN: Under the dark arches of the Past there is no Future.

THE OLD WOMAN: Had we done what we had to do we should not have done what we were about to do.

THE YOUNG MAN (*agitatedly*): What do you mean?

THE OLD WOMAN (*sombrely*): I do not know.

The Stranger enters mysteriously.

THE STRANGER: Yes! You do.

Goes out through the window.

Scene closes.

SCENE IV.—*The fair at Bilj. Peasants singing. The YOUNG MAN brooding.*

PEASANTS:

Ho cszlapány.

Pn zlompány.

Oomcz habány.

Hu!

THE YOUNG MAN: Is that a national song?

AN OLD PEASANT: Yes!

THE YOUNG MAN: Oh.

(Goes out sideways.)

Scene closes.

SCENE V.—*The Piff Pass. The OLD WOMAN weaving, with her head in a sack. The YOUNG MAN enters.*

THE YOUNG MAN: Only the Infinite is imponderable.

THE OLD WOMAN: Homogeneous yet impalpable, correlated with introspective determinism, yet static!

THE YOUNG MAN: Have you a cheese?

THE OLD WOMAN (*sadly*): No.

They weep together. Snowstorm.

Scene closes.

SCENE VI.—*A street in Pomplóny. The YOUNG MAN walking quickly. The OLD WOMAN enters from the opposite direction.*

THE YOUNG MAN: Is that you?

THE OLD WOMAN: Yes.

THE YOUNG MAN: On! On!

They pass each other, and are soon lost in the darkness.

Scene closes.

SCENE VII.—*A hut in the mountains. Night. The OLD WOMAN with her head under a tub, moaning. The Spirit of the MILKMAN enters.*

SPIRIT OF THE MILKMAN: I once sold milk.

THE OLD WOMAN (*dully*) : Did you ?

The Spirit of the MILKMAN drifts out.

The YOUNG MAN enters, hastily.

THE YOUNG MAN (*desperately*) : Why am I here ?

THE OLD WOMAN (*in a muffled voice*) : You were led by Fate.

The Stranger enters.

THE STRANGER : No ! You think you were led by Fate, but you were not led by Fate. Nobody is led by Fate except those whose fate it is to be led. Those who feel they are led are not those who feel that they would not have been led ; had they felt that, their fate would have remained the same, though it would not have been the same had they never thought that they would not have been led ; and *vice versa*.

THE YOUNG MAN : Who are you ?

THE STRANGER : I am Fate.

(Disappears up the chimney.)

A long silence.

PEASANTS (*singing in the distance*) :

Czu tompány

Gnu zhábny,

Pn !

THE OLD WOMAN (*in a stifled voice*) : They are singing.

THE YOUNG MAN (*thickly*): Yes. They are singing.

THE OLD WOMAN: It is a national song.

THE YOUNG MAN (*face downwards*): Is it?

Storm. Thunder. A waterburst sweeps down the gorge and blots out the hut, the YOUNG MAN, and the OLD WOMAN. Earthquake. The mountain bursts into eruption.

A VOICE IN THE MOUNTAINS: *Plonk!*

Scene closes.

I fancy this will give the Stage Society something to think about.

V

A DOWNLAND CRISIS

AS I lay the other day on the crisp sweet turf of a high down in Southern England, thinking of a thousand things, I perceived an old man of agricultural aspect slowly mounting a winding sheep-path towards me.

It was an afternoon of the kind for which this county has received a great deal of recognition from literary men ; that is to say, the soft western breeze brought the scent of thyme and gorse and the soothing tinkle of sheep-bells ; the larks were singing in the blue ; a cuckoo shouted melodiously in a glade ; the dim blue Weald lay at my feet, the rolling Downs to right and left ; and over my shoulder the distant Channel sparkled in the sun. Everything was up to schedule ; and as I lay there a party of bronzed and keen-eyed men passed me, reciting verses by Mr. Belloc and Mr. Kipling and swearing to defend the Downs with their last breath. By this I knew them to be Sussex lads from Hampstead Garden

Suburb, and as they passed I saluted them, saying it was a fine day. To which the most enthusiastic of them replied, "By Gad, so it——" and then checked himself and said hurriedly, "Ar, zo it be! Tar'ble fine, zurely!" And to cover his confusion he broke into the old Sussex song called "The Gorble Tree," in which the others joined lustily as they went:

"The Gorble Tree, the Gorble Tree,
Arl mortlesome the whorples be,
Avoore the dumbledore do fly
Arl mazed 'e be, and zo be I."

As they disappeared over the hill I heard one of them say peevishly, "But what is a whorple?" ; at which his companions turned on him savagely and hissed "Shut up!" And they went their way singing.

Then I saw and recognised the old man who was coming up the path. He was the ancient agriculturist employed by the Sussex Publicity Bureau to wind up the automatic cuckoos which one hears in every brake, to attend to the larks, to sit in inns and talk loudly about fairies and dew-ponds, and generally to stimulate and encourage the literary immigrants who (as others besides myself well know) swarm all

over the county.* He is very old, and his features are almost completely obscured by whisker, and his legs are thin and gnarled, and his eyes are red and glowing like live coals.

"Yaffle be arl burblesome," I said court-
eously, pointing to the sky, where a lark was
giving the usual matinée.

He merely grunted; and then he told me
suddenly that he was sick of Sussex and would
gladly resign his job. The natives, he said,
hated him and would gladly put him to death,
because part of his duty was to sing Sussex
folk-songs in inns; whereas it is notorious that
the rural inhabitants of these parts greatly
prefer such foreign folk-songs as "Yes! We
Have No Bananas!" and indeed sing them
perpetually in a roaring voice.

He said, "Are there any other counties in
England?"

I said there were. I said it twice.

He said anxiously, "But are their place-
names such that (like ours in Sussex) they

* See Knox (E. V.); Strumpff (tr. Bodger), *The Literary Invasion of Sussex*; Parbleu, *Travels in Sussex* (1924); Podgkin (Dr.), *Sussex and the Immigration Menace*; Whiffle (Sir A.), *The Plague Years; Some Account of the Influx of Literary Men into Sussex* (1920-1924); Guffin (W. H.), *Can Sussex Recover her Independence?* (1923); Willowly (W.), *The Ethics of Resistance; Massacre No Panacea* (1923); Eagerley (Miss Ella), *Be Strong! An Appeal to Sussex Women*; Noggin (Epistemon, F.R.H.S.), *Spraying as a Solution*; and other authorities.

can be worked into rhyme racy of the soil ? ”

I said, “ Why, yes. For example :

“ ‘ The ale they drink in Giggleswick
They brew in Biggleswade ;
In Chirk and Bilbster, so they say,
Their scores are never paid ;
In Bugsworth and Fazakerley
Their snouts are red and blue,
But the very best tippie of all, I ween,
Is the beer at Luton Hoo ! ’ ”

“ Is that a drinking song ? ” said the old man doubtfully. I nodded and began again :

“ A man may swig at Timperley,
And fill his paunch at Diss,
In Bootle and Balquhiddier too
A cask is not amiss.
At Cleobury Mortimer——”

“ Hold ! ” cried the old man, “ that is sound verse indeed, and after the best models ; but can these other counties inspire also songs of love and emotion ? ”

I coughed slightly and began :

“ When Cheadle lads were Maying,
And girls from Potter’s Bar
Would join them in their playing,
I’d touch the light guitar.
But now the sun no longer
Gilds Peebles with its ray,
From Worksop and from Scrooby
Is fled the joyous day.”

“That,” I said, “is from ‘A Loamshire Lad.’ And again :

“ ‘I’ve never been to Wookey,
That lies beyond the West ;
In Spofforth, or in Widnes,
A wounded heart may rest ;
But in Yealmpton, ah ! in Yealmpton,
There peace with love doth blend,
And evening comes with healing
To Brigg and Ponder’s End.’ ”

As I recited the last words, with a not ignoble emotion, I turned to the ancient man at my side, but he was no longer there. Caught up in some ecstasy (so far as an old man so hairy can feel ecstasy) he had vanished from my sight. But over Chanctonbury a great star burned brightly, and then went out.

VI

THE BOODLE MANNER

A prominent English woman novelist, by writing a whole novel in unrhymed verse, has hit upon an idea which will drive several literary persons of my acquaintance frantic with jealousy and rage at not having thought of it first. I know a man in Chelsea called Boodle who will be foaming at the jaws. He was hailed (by Doodle in *The Mausoleum*, Foodle in *The Monthly Parnassus*, Goodle in *Helicon*, and others of his friends in other weekly and monthly reviews) the final flower of literary art when he wrote his brilliant story "The Sick Cheese," which has not a single verb in it from beginning to end.

It is true that Noodle, Poodle, and Quoodle criticised it savagely in *The Sarcophagus* and the Christmas number of *Murk*; but everybody knows that they hate Boodle like poison because he sat above them at a recent gala dinner of the Laurel Club, quite near the Pomeranian princess who was the guest of honour. You may have heard what an exhibition the ignoble Poodle made of himself

on being presented. He crawled backwards on all fours to his seat. What a *gaffe* ! And what a critic ! How we all sniggered !

Boodle, as I say, will be black in the face with rage at not having thought of writing a novel in unrhymed verse. I called at his flat yesterday and found him brooding over a liqueur-glass of ether, which he takes on strawberries. He told me that he had an idea of writing his next story in the shape of a skull ; but I reminded him that it had been thought of before. "George Herbert, you know," I said, "wrote heaps of poems in the shape of wings and axes and altars and things. They thought it pretty smart in Charles the First's time."

Boodle only snarled.

"Ever thought of writing a novel backwards ? " I asked.

He looked up quickly.

"That would be frightfully brilliant," I said warmly. "Another daring *tour de force* by Mr. Boodle, one of the young rebels who really counts. A story that grips and dazzles from last to first. Mr. Boodle has discovered a new art-form which expresses in an even more metabolic ecstasy the synthetic clamancy of his hypofibulating and ultrazomic upsurge."

Boodle said he would make a note of the idea. He then told me that he had already

written a short dramatic story which, he thought, would be received with great respect by the critics. "Not only is it in free verse," he said, "*but there are no capital letters in it at all and no punctuation whatsoever.* What d'you say to that?"

"Read it, *cher Maître*," I said reverently, rising and sitting at his feet.

He took a manuscript from a drawer, smoothed back his hair, coughed, and handed the story to me, saying that the tone-value of his voice was not at that moment attuned to the vibrant colour-chords of something or other, and begging me, if my thoughts were purple, to wait until I felt a silver-grey sensation stealing over me before reading it. The story, which I have Boodle's permission to print here for the first time, is called

AFTERNOON TEA

blast you you white-faced hag
thought the sweet faded woman
watching her visitor
eating thin bread and butter
i hate you you come into this village
with your lipstick and aspirin and
your west kensington airs
and steal my lover my george
till you came the village was happy
now look at it william blurge flogs his wife
old mr. gumble hangs himself and so do ernest guffin
and sam rumbelow and what happened to henry

mangle's aunt kezia you know
best you hussy the place is like hell
thinking these things the sweet faded woman
kissed her visitor saying do come again and see
the garden curse you she thought i'd like
to shove you down the well but she only said
how is dear mr. goldstein i adore
those old spanish families good-bye dear
you red-headed trull she said to herself
that afternoon george came to her and said
i love borgia goldstein i am going away
are you you swine she thought bitterly
how like a poultry farmer but she only said
very well george you will need a new vest
and going wearily upstairs she came down
with a woollen vest and a rook rifle
thinking to herself one more tragedy
or so is nothing in english village life
but she only said what about the hens george
and george replied same feed as before
just then she heard a high voice in the street
and resting the rook rifle on the sill
she took a weary pot-shot mona cried george
what have you done i never liked her she replied
you won't need this vest till saturday now so
saying she went upstairs again
and george rushed after her saying do forgive me
i didn't mean it there was nothing between us
we only discussed eggs and dairy produce
and crossing minorcas with rhode island reds
but as he spoke the rifle
went off again
and laid him low while sweet faded mrs. pink stared
dully into vacancy murmuring is this life is
this life but only a thrush replied
singing in the garden and hopping
hither and thither in search of
worms

I said to Boodle, "This is indeed a slice of life—raw, quivering, palpitant, instinct with the essential thingamajig of the eternal what-d'you-call-it."

He said, coughing a little, "I flatter myself I probe fairly deeply into the things that matter in Life and Literature."

"Poodle," I said, yawning, "is pretty hot stuff at it too. Have you read his 'Crystal Cabman'?"

Boodle flushed darkly at this and began to quote from his works, published and unpublished, as also from his press-cuttings. The I's flashed past (as somebody has written somewhere) like telegraph poles. As he paused to take breath Moodle looked into the room. Moodle is a fashionable actor.

"Hullo!" said Moodle heartily. "Have I told you how I——?"

But I had seized my hat and was downstairs and in the street before they could look round, giving instructions, as I passed the hall-porter, for the removal of the bodies by the dustman in the morning.

VII

WILLIAM AND JASPER ; OR, THE REWARDS OF BENEVOLENCE

A Moral Tale, written after reading a Familiar News Paragraph.

IN the parish of N——, in L——shire, there dwelt two Farmers, William Trueman and Jasper Crabtree, the One Renowned for Virtue and Integrity as was the Other for Wickedness and Vice.

The constant Contemplation of such Innocent Objects, animate and inanimate, as Cows, Daisies, Churns, Chaff-cutters, and new-born Lambs had awakened in the Breast of William Trueman the liveliest Feelings of Benevolence and Piety, which Beamed in his every Feature ; whereas Jasper Crabtree could not Observe the Simplest Buttercup without a Sneer, and openly Boasted that he was Proof against the Improving Influences of Nature. Such a Temper could not fail to make Jasper Odious throughout the Country-side.

The essential Difference between these two Men was never shewn more Strongly than in the year 18—, when a Royal Personage, visiting

the Parish, Desired that both William and Jasper should be Presented to Him. What was the Delight of William Trueman when the August Traveller, observing, "Hey? Hey? Hey?" Condescended Graciously to Pat him thrice on the Head! And what, on the other Hand, was the Shame and Confusion of Jasper Crabtree when the Royal Visitor, instead of Demonstrating the same Approval, Recoiled from him with Every Expression of Loathing and Horror!

The Result, as might be Expected, was that whereas William grew Every Day more Kind and more Truly Virtuous, the Features of Jasper took on a Deeper Cast of Villainy. What wonder that the One became Universally Beloved by the Peasantry of the Neighbourhood, by Parson Toombs, by Squire Harkaway, and by Persons of Rank and Fortune, while the Other was Universally Execrated by All who Knew him!

It happened that one day William Trueman was Walking in his Fields, Meditating on Nature and Contemplating his Ploughmen, who were Wont to Devote some Hours a Day to the Discussion of Improving Themes, such was their Respect and Admiration for this Really Good Man. At other Times they would Leave their Labours to Sing and Skip with the

Lambs around their Ploughs ; for William was No Foe to Innocent Recreation.

As he Smiled Indulgently on seeing his Humble Friends Quit their Work in a Body and Retire to a Hedge-Row, the Better to discuss some Moral Subject, Jasper Crabtree, who Passed at that Moment, Said with a Sneer, "Hark'ee, honest William, I believe you are Not the Man I Took you For."

"And Why is That, Jasper?" asked William.

"Why," returned Jasper Crabtree, "as I Passed yon Hedge I heard One of your Fellows, George, Complain that he had a Headache. Yet I think you Do Not Hasten to Soothe him!"

"Nay," exclaimed William, flushing Deeply, "you Do me Wrong, Jasper. Had I Known that George was Ailing I should have Rushed to his Assistance Long Since." So saying, William Hastened across the Field, and was soon Comforting his Lowly Friend by Smoothing his Forehead, at the same time Repeating several Lines of Mr. Wordsworth, a Poet to Whom he was Extremely Partial.

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In this Manner did William Trueman Endeavour Himself to the Whole Countryside, and no less did his Amiable Character show itself

during his Annual Visit to London, a City which, Although the Resort of the Gay, the Affluent, and the Vicious, contains Several Public Buildings of a Most Impressive Nature. It was while William Trueman was Pointing Out to Jasper Crabtree (whom he had Pre-vailed on to Accompany him in Search of Manly and Rational Pleasure) the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries that a Young Man of Elegant Appearance and Respectable De-meanour approached, and in a Firm Voice addressed William Trueman as follows :

“ Let it not Surprise you, sir, to Learn that I have Lately Suffered the Loss of a Relative in whom Virtue and Munificence were Inextricably Mingled. My Uncle (for such I am Proud to Own him) has Left me Charged with a Duty at once Pleasing and Responsible ; and I Cannot But Think that a Gentleman of your Benevolent and Agricultural Exterior can be of Great Service to me in the Noble and Dis-interested task I have to Perform.”

The Young Man then informed William briefly that he had been Bequeathed the Sum of £10,000, which he Was to Distribute among a Number of Institutions for Persons of the Lower Classes of a Respectable Character.

“ But First ” (said he) “ I must Ask, sirs, for some Token of your Worthiness to aid me in so Admirable a Work. Here are Bank of

England Notes to the Value of £500. Do you Each in your Turn hand me £200 Against my Return from my Lawyer's, where I have some Business that will Keep me for a Few Minutes only."

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At this Speech Jasper Crabtree began Very Contemptuously to cry "Fudge" and "Pish," asking the Young Man whether he took him for a Zany; at which Both the Young Man and William Covered their Faces for Shame and Sorrow at such Talk. William then answered Jasper gently as follows:

"I own, Jasper, that such Railing distresses me Beyond Measure; but as I am Assured of the Disinterestedness of this Young but Influential Man, who would Never have Proposed such a Thing had he Not Been Actuated by the Liveliest Virtue, do you Go your Way, and I will Myself Supply the £400 Necessary to Bring About this Good work."

So saying William Gave the Young Man Bank Notes to the Value of £400, at the Same Time urging him to Hasten to his Lawyer's, in Order that No Time should be Lost. The Young Man, with Many Expressions of Satisfaction and Pleasure, accordingly Departed at a Brisk Pace, leaving William to exhort Jasper to a More Seemly Frame of Mind. Which he did, with Many Illustrations from Leading

Moral Writers ; and though the Young Man did Not Reappear, and though the Notes he had given to William were Speedily Discovered to be Counterfeit, and though William in consequence was Obliged to Give Up his Farm and Take Service with Jasper, who Treated him with Inconceivable Harshness, Kicking him Whenever they Met, and Finally Harnessing him to the Plough, Obliging him Thus to Travel on All-Fours, in which Position he frequently Devoured Large Quantities of Loam and Subsoil—in Spite of All This Jasper, who grew Extremely Rich and left £500,000 at his Death, Never Enjoyed the Superior Reputation for Benevolence which characterised William Trueman.

Since that Time many British Agriculturists have Emulated our Hero, to the Honour of the Farming and Allied Industries and to the Confusion of Those who Pretend that Adherence to the Soil is Necessarily Productive of Libertinism and Vice. The Shining Example of William Trueman, a true British Farmer, stands for All Time to Refute and Baffle the Traducers of the Plough and the Hay Fork.

VIII

CELTIC TWILIGHT

UNDER the influence of a sea-mist which came over the hills last night, drowning the moonlight and turning my little village, with its orange blots of window pane, into something strange and faëry, I have written a beautiful little play full of mist and moonshine and that Celtic vagueness for which many people think Mr. W. B. Yeats holds the world-rights.

This is not so ; and although the piece which follows is exquisitely mystical there is nothing in it which could bring a blush even to an Australian cheek. I call it *At the Pump*, and a couple of volumes octavo dealing with the proper method of playing it in masks and rubber gags, the stage setting, incidental music, and so forth will be shortly in the Press. The Two Musicians must be tall, thin, dark, young men used to bird life, and if possible they should play as if they had uncles drowned at sea on a starry night in June. The lighting is that of wax candles (plain, not fluted or decorated in any way), each 6 in. long and 1 in.

thick, held by three old men with no hopes of the Future.

AT THE PUMP

TWO MUSICIANS.

AN OLD MAN.

A YOUNG MAN.

A YOUNG GIRL.

THE GUARDIAN OF THE PUMP.

Night. A Pump in the depths of a Forest. The TWO MUSICIANS, one playing a gong and the other a zimblehorn, pass rhythmically across the stage, singing.

MUSICIANS :

*Deeper and drear,
Pallid and hoar
They are not here
It was no more.*

They go over. A GIRL has taken her place on the northern side of the Pump, against which an OLD MAN sits moaning and rocking to and fro. They are both motionless. The OLD MAN looks like a bat, and again, as the light changes, like an egg.

GIRL : Good evening.

OLD MAN : Who is there ? Who speaks to me ?

GIRL :

Your old white face is like the rising moon,
Or like a new-laid egg in February, or a cheese
Seen dimly through a mist. Ochone ! Ochone !

(She weeps bitterly.)

OLD MAN :

You have a glassy look about the eyes
That fills me with foreboding. Hark ! The
wind
Is moaning through the trees. I rather think
We shall have rain.

GIRL :

Strange dreams have led me here,
But why I know not, neither how nor whence,
Nor whither, nor how often.

OLD MAN (*nodding*) : I, too, find
Myself in dreams led on and on, and then
Led back again, and sometimes round and
round,
But why I do not know.

GIRL (*offended*) : I do not know
Why *you* should have the same experience. I
Am twice as mystical as you, and better-
looking.

OLD MAN :

When you have lived as long as I have lived
In this vague, brooding sort of atmosphere,
You cannot help being led by dreams and
visions

And stumbling up and down in Celtic mists
And knowing no more what is happening
Than my old Sunday hat.

*The OLD MAN bows his head into the
mud and stays there moaning. A
long silence.*

GIRL : But who will save me ?

The YOUNG MAN enters unperceived.

YOUNG MAN :

Why, Gubh, the son of Concobainhe !

OLD MAN : I do
Not know the name. Why are you here ?

YOUNG MAN :

By visions led and nameless dreams I come,
To meet the dread High King of Shadows. Is
He here ?

OLD MAN. He is not here.

YOUNG MAN : I beg your pardon.
Goes out unperceived.

GIRL (*bitterly*) :

I thought that I alone had dreams like that,
But now it seems that everybody has them !
And though one felt they did not lead one
anywhere
One liked to think one had them to oneself
And did not share them with such ordinary
people !

The Young Man re-enters unperceived.

OLD MAN: Who is that?

YOUNG MAN:

Led, as before, by haunted dreams,
But with, at last, some definite objective,
I seek the Pump!

OLD MAN (*shuddering*):

Not definite? Not *definite*?

This must be something new and sinister.

The GIRL, angry and bitter, begins to dance to the hidden music of the zimblehorn and gong.

OLD MAN:

Beware the Pump! Shun this accursed place.
Grey spirits haunt it, women (so they say)
With beaks like owls and fins like haddocks.

YOUNG MAN (*gripping his spear*): Bah!

He goes forward. The OLD MAN, moaning, begins to dance rhythmically.

As the YOUNG MAN reaches the Pump the GUARDIAN OF THE PUMP, a grey Woman without a face, rises, uttering a cry like that of a mole.

The GUARDIAN OF THE PUMP beckons to the YOUNG MAN and begins a ghostly dance, wavering backwards with strange cries to the edge of the forest. The YOUNG

MAN *slowly follows her. The air is full of weird music and twilight. A long silence.*

GIRL (*wildly*) : Where has she led him ?

OLD MAN (*moaning*) : Up the garden ; as I feared. Something was bound to happen.
Ai !

The OLD MAN buries his whiskers in the mud. The Two Musicians enter unperceived.

MUSICIANS (*singing*) :

*O shadows of doom
Un——*

OLD MAN (*sharply*) : No.

MUSICIANS : Sorry.

*They pass out rhythmically. As darkness falls the OLD MAN and the GIRL wander to and fro, gibbering.
Scene closes.*

Note.—In setting the scene for this play it is important to remember that the lighting is back and front. The actors must wear painted masks throughout and speak through gags, which should be made of the finest Para (not crepe) rubber. Should an actor swallow his gag he may continue to deliver his lines in

dumb-show and by dancing. The Old Man's whiskers are green and he wears gilt boots.

The Young Girl, who should have definite thoughts on clouds, is dressed in a dark green robe. The mud around the Pump, in which the Old Man buries his face at intervals, may be of clay or loam, but if the actors feel that they are playing on a calcareous or oolitic soil artificial mud may be prepared beforehand by one of the Musicians, who may or may not wear black (or grey) gloves, according as he interprets his rôle. When the Old Man speaks the words from "When you have lived . . ." to "my old Sunday hat" a low crooning should be made by the audience.

With regard to the words "Beware the Pump!" the actor playing the Old Man must deliver them as if they were uttered by a disembodied spirit partly muffled by a green cloak 5 ft. long and 6 ft. broad, without hem or trimmings of any description. At the last entry of the Musicians the darkness is so dense that only the top of the Old Man's head is visible to the audience, who must brood over the scene from that point to the end. See my *How To Play "At the Pump"* (Blotto and Balmer: two vols.; £2 2s. net; shortly).

IX

HARK ! HARK ! THE LARK !

(Written at the request of Professor Dogbody, then preparing his Thesis for the degree of D.Litt. at the Homer P. Goop University of Gooptown, Pa.; the subject being the Backchat of Shakespeare's Clowns.)

THE month is July 1584. The place is Warwickshire. The time is about three of the clock of a Tuesday afternoon. A young man just turned 20, with a high forehead and a clear, candid eye, is loitering through the summer meadows, knee-high in buttercups. Bees are humming drowsily in the heat; the cornfields wave in the sweet breeze; a scent of honeysuckle makes the air languorous. It is so hot that the level Warwickshire landscape trembles and wavers in the haze, and in a distant coppice a cuckoo is lazily shouting. There is not a cloud in the blue.

The young man takes a letter from his doublet and reads it with a frown. It is as follows :

“ FORTUNE THEATRE, LONDON, E.C.

“ July 16, 1584.

“ DEAR SIR,—I am much obliged to you for submitting your play *Love's Labour's*

Lost, and regret that I cannot see my way to use it.

“Yours faithfully,

“JAS. GOLDSTEIN,

“*Manager.*”

With a quick gesture the young man crumples the letter into a ball and hurls it from him, moodily resuming his walk. The cuckoo gives a mocking shout. The young man curses it, and mechanically feeling in his doublet brings out two more letters, which he glances through before tearing them up and scattering them to the breeze. The first one begins :

“LONDON,

“*July 15.*

“DEAR SIR,—Have you ever thought of making Money by your Pen? Writing for Profit *in your spare time* is at once a Pleasant and a Profitable——”

Zip! He has torn it viciously into a thousand pieces. The other letter is from the Vicar of Stratford-on-Avon, and contains the following passage :

“I am afraid *Antony and Cleopatra*,* though extremely interesting, is not *quite* what I wanted for our Christmas entertainment. Per-

* Yes, yes: A glaring anachronism. Never mind.

haps you would be kind enough to write us something imbued with a slightly more definite Churchmanship ? One does so feel that Cleopatra in your little play, though clever, is not quite a *good* influence. . . . Possibly you would not mind interpolating into her speeches a little address to mothers on some simple, bright topic, such as 'Sunshine in Home Life,' or 'Service, not Self' ? A cheerful, *helpful* tone, definite yet comprehensive, would greatly improve the play. One feels at present that Antony, sincere as he is, could never have been really *at home* in our busy little circle. . . ."

The young man (whose name, by the way, is Shakespeare—one of the Warwickshire Shakespeares) destroys this letter also, and saunters on, swiping at the daisies with his rapier. He is clearly in the worst possible temper, and he glares furiously at a lark which is singing high in the sky. As he reaches the next stile a rustic figure in a smock, with a face like a muffin, clambers over it.

"Good day," says young Mr. Shakespeare surlily.

"Give ye good day, zur," says the rural person, grinning from ear to ear. He carries a scythe and has wisps of hay in his hair.

"Dost live by thy scythe, friend ?" says Mr. Shakespeare moodily.

“Marry, no, zur,” answers the agriculturist like a flash. “I do live by the church.”

Mr. Shakespeare lifts his eyebrows, for he knows that he is face to face with one of the rural clowns for whom Warwickshire is famous. Stout fellows they are, full of breezy japes and sparkling cross-talk, and liable at any moment to burst into song. Young Mr. Shakespeare, who has met one or two Warwickshire clowns before, has often toyed with the idea of putting one of them into a play; and from time to time, indeed, he has dogged them with little notebooks in which he jots down their racy sayings, just as Mr. — does in Sussex this very day. But to-day the young dramatist is in an evil temper, and he hates the silly fat face of this agriculturist.

“Hast a tedious good wit, fellow,” he says coldly.

“An I have, sir,” returns the clown heartily, “then ’tis all Bucklersbury to a bumbledore that the Picrocholians are in the Tenth House of Mercury, for my lady hath a sweet breath. And an I have not, sir, then wise men may go hang and fools dance a fandango, with a tillimaufry; for your cogging knave is no tip-staff, and there’s much virtue in railing.”

(“That’s not bad,” thinks Mr. Shakespeare grudgingly, making a mental note of it.)

“Go to,” he says aloud. “Thou’rt a drumbling fool.”

“Why, sir,” says the clown merrily, “an I be, so I be ; and an I be not, so I lack, and may e’en mend myself withal ; for your botcher when he is mending is botch’d, truly, and when bats buzz in the belfry the sky may rain alewives an it list. Argal, there’s no calamity touching the price of peascods, and fat Joan may get her to the buttery for the nonce ; an she do not, there’s ne’er a shambling knave of them all but cries ‘Hold’ to the leasing o’t ; and your Acroceraunians are no true men.”

At any other time Mr. Shakespeare would laugh himself sick at this splendid fun, but to-day it simply depresses him. He wonders whether a London audience will really stand for it. After all, here is a rich lode of rustic wit practically untapped. . . .

“Where do you get words like ‘Picrocholians’ ? ” asks Mr. Shakespeare abruptly.

The clown says his brother is a professional fool in the service of a neighbouring landowner, and he gets lots of funny ideas from him. He (the clown’s brother) is particularly good (he says) at repartee and conundrums.

“Repartee . . . conundrums,” muses Mr.

Shakespeare. "I wonder if *they'd* get over with a Globe or Bankside audience."

(He does not know his London audience yet, you see; nor, of course, does he hear the roars of laughter echoing up the years from the ages yet unborn. . . .

"I saw your brother yesterday."

"You saw my brother yesterday?"

"Yes, I saw your brother yesterday."

"Which brother of mine did you see yesterday?"

"Hugo."

"Hugo?"

"No. *You go. I've been.*")

We have become snappier, have we not? (I doubt, by the way, if the Fool in *Twelfth Night* would get much of a salary on the Mosstoll circuit to-day.) We rather like a red nose, too. Had that idea occurred in 1584 the whole history of English drama might have been changed.

Meanwhile Mr. Shakespeare pensively resumes his walk. A girlish figure flits past a hedge and stands before him.

"Hullo, Ann," says young Mr. Shakespeare abstractedly. "What d'you think about a few conundrums in the comedy scenes?"

X

A SCANDAL OF THE SOIL

O AGRICULTURISTS, and all you who till and triturate the kindly soil; you too, hedgers and ditchers, and you who drive the groaning plough, and you, strong wielders of the sickle and the hayfork; and you, aged rural men with features entirely surrounded by hair, whether crows nest in your whiskers or whether the swarming bee finds refuge there—I summon and call upon you all to prepare and make yourselves ready to receive a piece of news so awful, so dreary, so heart-shaking, so appalling, so momentous, so horrific, so gorbacious, so unspeakably final and metagrobolising, that I doubt if such a thing has ever happened before in the history of agriculture, or can happen again for ever, *in sæcula sæculorum*. For as I walked on a hot afternoon lately through an upland field where the sunburnt haymakers were at work in the hay (and where else would they be?) I saw a reaping machine drawn by two stout horses, and at their head a country wench in a large hat of some kind of straw; and she wore (O Heaven! O my Sussex!) *silk stockings*.

There was no mistake. Above her the larks sang in a sky flecked with little fleecy clouds. Around her the rich fields rippled in the sea breeze, and a shepherd folded his sheep with rustic oaths. And there she stood in the hay in her silk stockings, engaged pursuant to the Agricultural Labour (Employment) Act of 1885, with never a soul there, except myself, to see in her stockings England's decadence and agriculture's ruin. I think if my ancient friend Elijah Gumble, the fiercest and most whiskered agriculturist in captivity, had been there he would have instantly been at the girl with a hayfork ; but he was far away, and not a distant bellow rent the summer air. I gazed dumbly at the girl, as a Spartan general might have gazed at a soldier who asked him for half an hour off during a stiff battle to wave his hair, and then I stumbled home to tea.

Let every agriculturist contemplate this picture of Oriental luxury (comparable only with that of Rome on the eve of the fall of the Empire) and realise his shame. Possibly the girl had a lipstick as well. I should not be surprised if you could now buy hayforks with a powder-puff in the handle. It is too late to do anything now, at any rate. The rot has set in, even in Sussex. Silk stockings are openly worn in the hayfield. As the greatest

of Sussex poets has sung, concerning a hardly lesser disaster :

*"Spirits that call and no one answers ;
Ha'nacker's down and England's done.
Wind and Thistle for pipe and dancers
And never a ploughman under the Sun.
Never a ploughman. Never a one."*

My friend Professor Bodger tells me that agriculture outside Sussex was not suddenly rotted by luxury, but that the canker has been gnawing in other counties for years. The Professor, indeed, sat on the Royal Commission on Decadence in the Farming Industry (excluding Sussex), which issued its Report as late as 1888. An extract or so from the Report may be valuable here :

THIRD DAY

Sir Amphibolus Blimp (Chairman), Professor Bodger, Professor Whiffle, Dr. Guffin, Sir Hector Bulge, and Fotheringhay Stodgkin, Esq.

Farmer Mangle called, and his examination concluded.

(687) SIR A. BLIMP : We have heard Mr. Mangle's evidence. Would any member care to put any question to the witness ?

(688) DR. GUFFIN : Could Mr. Mangle tell us whether the use of face creams by ploughmen has an adverse effect on their efficiency ?

(689) PROF. BODGER: My personal experience is that it has no such effect. At the same time too much attention to the complexion may lead to, e.g. refusal to plough in a strong sun, swooning or hysteria when requested to plough soil of a harsh colour, and so forth.

(690) SIR A. BLIMP: We must differentiate between a reasonable regard for beauty and mere hedonism. A cowman may wear gloves, for example, to keep his hands white. But a cowman crowned with roses is a different matter.

(691) MR. STODGKIN: "Lady Julia," who writes the weekly Agricultural Toilet Chats in the *Farmers' Gazette*, has an illuminating paragraph this week, which I may perhaps be permitted to read?

(692) SIR A. BLIMP: Certainly.

(693) MR. STODGKIN: The paragraph is headed "Pigs and Politeness," and is as follows:

"Dear, dear, dear, dear! Henry G. (Hogsnorton) tells me that he is in great trouble. Though only a pigman, Henry likes to make the most of himself, and quite right too! But the other day while Henry was brilliantining his hair and choosing a nice Liberty cushion to lie on while engaged in his duties he had quite an unpleasant scene with the farmer

—one of the rough old school, such as we rarely see nowadays—who insisted on Henry's leaving his toilet at once and going to the sty. But you should not have slapped the farmer, Henry! A courteous word would have been sufficient."

(694) PROF. WHIFFLE: The number of foot-pounds of energy expended in slapping a farmer twice are, roughly, equivalent to the amount of energy required to move a rhomboid octohedron through three dimensions at a temperature of 89 deg. Centigrade.

(695) SIR A. BLIMP: We have no evidence as to that. (To the witness): Thank you, Mr. Mangle. You may stand down.

(696) SIR HECTOR BULGE: I should like, Mr. Chairman, to ask one more question before the witness retires. Could he give us some indication of the average daily routine on his own farm?

(697) SIR A. BLIMP: The witness has already done so.

(698) SIR HECTOR BULGE: I am afraid I did not hear the early part of the evidence. Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, you would be good enough to recapitulate?

(699) SIR A. BLIMP: Certainly. The evidence you require is contained in the answers to QQ 365-433. Briefly, the daily routine on Mr. Mangle's farm is as follows:

8 a.m.—Morning tea.

9 a.m.—Breakfast (in bed).

10 a.m.—Presentation of birthday bouquets.

11 a.m.—Dairymaid's manicure and hair-dressing.

12 noon.—Ploughmen begin tasks (if fine).

12.30 p.m.—Ploughmen sprayed with attar of roses.

1 p.m.—Luncheon.

3 p.m.—Ploughmen's rest hour.

4 p.m.—Ploughmen resume tasks (if fine).

4.30 p.m.—*Thé dansant*.

5.30 p.m.—Cowmen, hedgers and ditchers, pigmen, thatchers, etc., permanently waved.

6 p.m.—Ploughmen dress for dinner.

7.15 p.m.—*Dîner dansant*.

8.30 p.m.—Battle of flowers.

9.30 p.m.—Dancing, orgies, etc.

2 a.m.—Bed.

(700) SIR HECTOR BULGE: Thank you. This seems a very reasonable schedule.

(701) SIR A. BLIMP: It has been approved by the Minister for Agriculture.

I do not think we need quote any more of this report, which can be had of His Majesty's Stationery Office, or at any bookstall, for the sum of 7s. 6d. net. It proves that something is wrong with agriculture, and that there was something, after all, in the stern, simple

manners of our forefathers. No Persian luxury enervated them ; no Capuan feasting cramped their style. They did not crown themselves with flowers or drink *crème-de-menthe* out of mugs. A simple gallon of beer before and after breakfast, a modest gallon before and after lunch, a quiet gallon at tea-time, a frugal gallon or two before and after supper and just at bedtime—this was the Spartan *régime* which stiffened their sinews and made their whiskers sprout. How jocund did they drive their teams afield ! The sight of silk stockings in the hayfield would have sent them black in the face with apoplexy.

I passed the field again, but the maiden was no longer there. An aged man gibbering under a hedge told me that the Sussex Publicity Bureau had spirited her away by night into Rutlandshire, which no literary man has ever heard of ; for the Bureau very rightly fears the scandal which would blaze up if one of the poets and essayists who crawl and pullulate about the county got to hear of it. Hence, for the fair fame of Sussex, I beg that you will say no more about it.

XI

MEET OTIS P. BOOMER

IT appears from the fashionable intelligence that wealthy American sportsmen have been renting Highland estates in greater numbers this year than ever before. I do not know whether this will affect Highland life to any extent; possibly old Mr. and Mrs. John Anderson, in the intervals of clomping a hill thegither, may exchange a pawky remark or two which would be completely unintelligible to you and me; a gillie or so may speir at a caddie while pu'ing the gowans in the brae; and bodies will be encountered as usual in the rye.

As for the Scottish agricultural population, I doubt very much whether an American invasion makes any difference to it. Students of Scottish folklore and balladry will remember the eerie old legend of the young man of Dunottar who spent Saturday night with a Cottar; at the start it was splendid, but before it was ended he was cursing R. Burns for a rotter. The cottar's Saturday night, I believe, has hardly changed at all since the poet got to hear of it, except, perhaps, that

canned pork and beans may now replace the halesome parritch. The weans probably speir and flechter as before.

I have been brooding over all these things ever since I heard that my friend Otis P. Boomer is now in Europe. Otis P. Boomer stands for Big Business and 100 per Cent. Efficiency, and he is so busy being busy that he hardly has time for anything. On the last occasion that he was in Europe he had no time, for instance, to do Italy ; so his private secretary had to read him a brief and snappy synopsis of Italian history, culture, literature, painting, music, architecture, poetry, and sculpture while Otis P. Boomer had his morning bath. As I entered his palatial suite to greet him I heard him mentioning that he'd seen shows at Shubert's which would knock George B. Dante's Divine Comedy for a row of Japanese ash-cans. . . .

This time, however, Mr. Boomer is determined (so he tells me in a telegram I received yesterday) to give the Scottish Highlands the once-over. Five minutes after his telegram Mr. Boomer himself arrived at my club, saying that he was real pleased to meet me again and gripping me painfully by the hand.

"Who's Walter G. Scott?" he asked abruptly.

I tentatively mentioned the name of a well-

known patent medicine. Otis P. Boomer's eye brightened, and then the light went out and he shook his head. The guy he meant, he said, was no business corporation.

"Ah," I said. "You mean the poet."

"You said it," said Otis P. Boomer, gripping my hand again. "Say, you're hep to that kinda dope. Shoot me a line concerning it."

I took Mr. Boomer into the library, and after some search we succeeded in procuring a copy of Scott from a neighbouring bookshop. Mr. Boomer, lighting a cigar and sinking into a deep chair, looked at his watch and gave me five minutes to put over a synopsis of the poet's life and works.

"Just the Big Idea," he added.

I did my best. Otis P. Boomer, observing that the poet seemed to have been a cheap sort of skate with no punch to him, asked for a specimen of the goods. I turned haphazard to the Lament for Duncan in "The Lady of the Lake," and hastily translating as I went I managed to give it some semblance of meaning. A reminiscence of Carl Sandburg, one of America's best-known poets, was my model, and the coronach went:

What the hell? He's gone,
he's beat it.
no use rubbering round any more

he's made a getaway,
he's dead.
gosh, there was some class to this boy !
he lined up with the big men,
a real red-blooded he-man, I'll say he was.
a real son of the big open air
that's Duncan
always there with the goods
never just rubbering at Life without a wrinkle in the dome ;
well, he's gone.
it gets us where we live,
it burns us like a shot of bootleg booze
 (cut out that bagpipe stuff
 let's have an oration
 give us an earful
 let the Big Bezuzus feed it to them)
no, he's quit,
he's faded away,
like the foam on near-beer,
Duncan's gone.
Bing !

I looked at Otis P. Boomer. His eyes were closed in ecstasy. The sight moved me profoundly, for I had never imagined that this keen, steel-eyed, iron-chinned man could care for poetry. At that moment his secretary entered to read to him rapidly the chief extracts from the British Museum catalogue (for he was seeing London). This was soon over.

Then Otis P. Boomer told me that he was about to make a lightning tour of Scotland (including the Highlands), and added that his secretaries had been working for days on the verse of a poet named Robinson (or Robson)

P. Burns without being able to give him a satisfactory *précis* of it. He added that several gentlemen with Scottish names had written to him since his arrival in London, but all on business; he had, indeed, rung one of them up and asked him to give him a line on this gink Burns, but the Scottish gentleman (a Mr. Donald McDonald McTaggart) had merely replied in an angry voice, "And vy should I? It ain't business, don't it?" and rung off.

I said, "That was just his kailyard pawkiness, I expect. Perhaps he was feeling a bit fey and leerie that morning, you know. They are a proud, brusque people, but hospitable to a degree. Did he offer to lend you anything? Yes? You refused? That would make him fearfully fey. The poet has a verse to this effect which you might care to know."

Otis P. Boomer, lighting a fresh cigar, nodded, and began rapidly signing a wad of correspondence which a secretary had just laid before him.

"It goes," I said, coughing slightly, "like this :

O wad ye gang tapsalteerie,
 Wi' hafflins joukin' drearily,
 Nae muckle hae ye leerily,
 I' thrums awa' ;
 A' grushlie waes the hunkles o't
 Nae clanjamfry gars flechtin' o't
 Nae bogles gin the snechtin' o't
 Forbye at a' !

“And that,” I said, confidentially, “is the whole secret of Scotland’s power.”

Otis P. Boomer, his cigar drooping from his nerveless jaw, his eyes goggling behind his high-power horn-rimmed glasses, gazed at me dumbly, as one stricken with a palsy. But I merely wrung his hand, saying it looked like rain, and went away.

XII

LOVE IN THE VALLEY

IN Town (so far as I remember, for it already seems an age since I gave up its dubious pleasures and retired into the sweet and innocent scenes of rural life) it is the custom of a youth who wishes to please a maiden to give her lunch at the Ritz or the Berkeley, to take her to Lord's or Hurlingham or on the river, and to finish an expensive day at the theatre or the dance-club. Here in the country we give the girl an orange and a clip across the ear. *O sancta simplicitas ! O Arcadia !*

Very many pleasant things have vanished from the English countryside. Where are the shepherds who danced the morris ? Where are the maidens of whom sweet Mistress Dorothy Osborne wrote to Sir William Temple—the maidens tending sheep who lay in the shade, singing of ballads ? Where are the lads who grinned through horse-collars in Mr. Spectator's time ? Where (in a word) are the Rubes of yesteryear ? I find none of them except in my lovely little village, where old whiskered men still repeat to their grandchildren the

loves of William and Susan. The story, which I propose to tell you now, was told to me by an aged man who remembered the rustic lovers well; and as he repeated it his aged voice rose to a piercing scream and he went black in the face with emotion.

Susan Moppett (said the aged man) was the pride of the village, and as good as she was beautiful. At making a tansy or a syllabub no hand was as light as hers, and strangers came from far and near to see her wrestle with cowmen on the green.

Susan was beloved by William Hayseed, a shepherd whose features, though resembling a ham, were constantly aglow with piety and benevolence; and George Mangle, the handsomest pig-herd in the countryside, burned for her as well. The girl, indeed, revered William, but her fancy had been more strongly attracted by George, who, though totally lacking in principle, could move both his ears and crack the joints of his thumbs; an accomplishment which, showy and meretricious as it was, was well calculated to dazzle the female heart and render it blind to the qualities with which William Hayseed was so liberally endowed.

One evening, as William was walking in the fields, sighing deeply and indulging in a

soliloquy on the vanity of human wishes, he beheld at a distance the dear object of his affections, and hastening at once to her side, fell on his knees and addressed Susan as follows: "At such a time, when the air is filled with the songs of the feathered part of creation, and when the prospect of smiling meads and gently purling streams invites thoughts of the most respectable kind, it is impossible, Susan, for the breast to heave and the cheek to burn with any emotion but that of Love!"

So saying William Hayseed plucked a nose-gay of daisies and offered it to the girl, repeating vows of the most unexceptionable kind.

Conceive of his dismay when, from a neighbouring grove where he had been carving Susan's name on every tree, Handsome George Mangle leaped forth! It took but a moment for George to hasten to the blushing fair and send her, with a single hearty smack, tottering against a tree; and Susan, returning the blow and felling him to the ground, at the same time observing, "Ha' done, now, George!" left hardly a doubt in the breast of the unhappy William that his favoured rival stood before him. At last, after a brisk bout of in-fighting, George Mangle gave the girl a thick ear, and had the happiness of seeing his love returned.

On observing this William Hayseed at once retired into the grove, whence he emerged soon afterwards repeating the following lines :

Tho' glitt'ring Folly oft doth go
Where Frenzy leads the train,
Let shudd'ring Reason wake and blow
Her sounding trump amain !
By raving Pride and Envy led
Pale Pity swoons apace,
And glaring from her icy bed,
Despair doth all embrace !

Let Prudence now resume her sway
And smiling Temperance reign ;
Let Vice now shun the golden day
And Pride recoil again !
Now Freedom shakes the hand of Joy
And Liberty doth soar,
While Piety shall e'er employ
The breast once steeped in Gore !

As William Hayseed ceased to repeat these moving lines, which he had composed in the grove, Susan hid her face in her hands and seemed ready to swoon, while George Mangle, with every feature pale as ashes, strove to retain the sneer upon his lips.

In vain did he endeavour, by moving his ears both simultaneously and alternately, to reassert over the now shrinking girl that empire of which he had once boasted. In vain did he rehearse the choicest of those imitations

of farmyard life which had so often ensnared the fair and captivated the more thoughtless and pleasure-loving of the female race. Loudly exclaiming "Retire, George Mangle, for ever!" Susan Moppett fell upon the breast of William Hayseed, who with upturned eyes invoked a blessing on the girl and sternly bade his rival depart. A month later William and Susan were betrothed; George Mangle, baffled and defeated, had already fled the village.

The aged agriculturist who told me the story ceased, and we both wept silently for a time. I then asked him what happened to the happy pair. He sneezed twice and replied that George Mangle fell into vice and became an actor, giving farmyard imitations twice nightly at the Assembly Hall in the neighbouring town of M——, in R——shire. In this life of feverish and abandoned gaiety, alas, Susan Moppett joined him a few weeks later; and, although they sent William a present (such as a mug, or a coloured motto, or a set of views) every week he was never quite the same.

In a year's time George's clever imitation of a sick duck had secured him an engagement from a great London manager, Mr. Corkman, and they were henceforth able to send William

champagne, which he drank in large quantities from a tankard. "But he never could forgive," added the aged man thickly through his whiskers.

This is the story rural mothers tell their young in my village, praising the virtue of William Hayseed and sternly warning them against the stage; and you may be sure that any child with double joints or a tendency to make faces through a hoop—that is to say, any potential theatrical star—is severely handled. And as I passed through the village the other evening, in the cool of the day, with the air full of the chirping of birds and the distant sound of rural lovers clumping their beloved, I thought of the shepherd in the *Bucolics* and Galatea escaping to the trees. The playful minx! What a bang her agricultural lover must have given her when he caught her!

There are some things which are immemorial, and the way of rural love is one; like thatching a rick and building a wall and wangling the glebe and robbing industrious (but dull) bees of their honey. Had William but handed Susan a little of the rough stuff what a different ending their unhappy story might have had! Love is so precious, love is so beautiful, love is so——

Smack!

I think that was Henry Higgs, of Gumble Farm. It had the well-known Higgs *brio*. The boy is honest and industrious, and his betrothed is a good girl, with the best straight left in the village. So (as Mephistopheles remarked to Martha) so runs the world away.

XIII

A NORMAN CONQUEST

AS I was sitting in an inn in the town of Falaise one day recently, meditating on life and death, I saw a Norman bleed.

He was an enormously stout and ruddy Norman and he was shaving himself at a little glass in the courtyard, and as he shaved he cut himself and bled freely and swore a terrible great Norman oath. So bled and so swore, I should think, the men who pushed our ancestors about at Hastings under Duke William.

I nodded kindly at him, for I am a friend to all fat men and, indeed, collect them instead of butterflies. There was a farmer in Devonshire some years ago, and an innkeeper at St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, under the High Pyrenees—not to speak of a farmer in the Limousin quite recently who . . . But no. Some ignoble collector is sure to steal a march on me: some upstart lacking in taste who would burst eagerly into the Limousin and spoil everything, instead of standing a little off like a connoisseur and rolling this king and

emperor of fat men (so to speak) round his tongue, at the same time acknowledging the beneficent and inscrutable designs of Providence, which has created an agriculturist so enormous, so globular, so husky, so immovable, so exquisite in every way. So much for him.

I nodded amiably, therefore, at this obese and excellent Norman who had by now left off swearing by the Great Horn Spoon of Caen (or whatever their local oath is) and was dabbing at his chin.

“It flows!” he said.

“It does,” I said. “Yet Simple Faith is more than Norman Blood.”

“Who said that?” he asked sharply.

I told him it was Alfred Lord Tennyson—a poet of whom I do not think he had heard, for he shrugged his huge shoulders and went on shaving, observing that all poets were imbeciles. He told me that his aged aunt in Lisieux had had a son who was a poet; a sickly kind of *crétin* who was fit for nothing but to scribble verses and be ultimately hanged, and was the scandal of the family. He himself, this fat Norman agriculturist, felt the disgrace very deeply, as I could see.

I said, “In England we have a great many poets, and all at large. Segregation is not practised among us to any extent, unless a

poet develops too criminal tendencies ; for under our laws poets cannot be shot or banged to death merely for poetising poetically in a poetworthy manner. Why, one of our English poets habitually wears a tall hat and a coat with astrakhan trimmings in the evening, and is almost universally respected ! ”

He raised his eyebrows at this.

“ Further,” I said with a large gesture, “ let me tell you that among us poetry ranks among the Liberal Professions, and is paid for at as much as threepence a line, or (if it is about Nature) as much as sixpence. For a Sonnet, if not too long, I have known a poet get as much as five shillings ; but it is true that this poet had obtained (by blackmail) a Cabinet Minister’s secret, and could therefore practically demand his own price ; and it is also true that the Sonnet for which he obtained so much money contained such words as ‘ honour,’ ‘ England,’ ‘ fame,’ ‘ glory,’ and ‘ Drake,’ which are recognised by custom and by law as Captain or Master-Words, commanding the higher fee.”

The stout Norman called huskily for cider, which in his pleasant country is sharper and paler than that they make in Hereford and Somerset. This he began to drink very slowly, goggling at me over his glass ; and finally, after brooding for a while over what I had told him, he said abruptly :

“Are you going to the *Kermesse* of Saint-Valéry?”

I said, “No. And let me tell you this in addition,” I said frankly, “that among us there are prosperous poets, poets of substance, poets efficient, poets leaders of the industry, poets mass-productive, poets of output. I do not say we have anybody like Homer C. Slogger, the famous poet of Chicago, Ill., whose slogan—

*Are you Getting the Kind of Sonnet
You Want?*

SEE IT'S A SLOGGER.

*Look For the Little Red Star on Every
Genuine Slogger Product.*

** * Your Editor's Got One—*

is known all over two Continents, and whose verse-factory works day and night. The Slogger system enables a piece of verse of any length to be mailed by return to any address. We have no English Slogger at present, but one or two of our poets, notably”—I mentioned them—“are creeping up with their sales. More than one of them has, indeed, a motor-car and money in the bank.”

At this I thought my Norman would have choked. His vast frame quivered like a jelly and his eyes stood out of his head. His

colossal waistcoat also heaved up and down and he gazed dumbly at me.

But bidding him be of good cheer and urging him to fly the devil and beware of over-much indulgence in wine and rich meats (for that they would certainly carry him off suddenly one day unshriven and unhouselled), I patted him lightly on the back and went away to the House of Duke William.

XIV

THE AGE OF GOLD

THE other evening, as the level rays of the sinking sun were gilding my happy valley and lending my Downs a beauty full of rest and secure completion, I had the good fortune to encounter Mr. Elijah Gumble, the famous agriculturist. The ancient man, indeed, was meditating in a ploughed field, alone with the rooks that swerved and cried around him and perched an instant on his hat; lonely and awful he stood against the skyline, a pair of gnarled legs rooted in the soil; lonely and terrible he stood there motionless, brooding on matters too high and dreadful for mortal understanding.

Approaching the aged man briskly I addressed him as follows: "Agriculture in the Golden Age (I need hardly remind you) may be said to have reached an eminence from which, with the solitary exception of a dubious revival in the eighteenth century (compare Watteau; Gay; Molière and the poets *passim*; and the Royal haymaking at Petit-Trianon) it has ever since steadily declined. For note

you that in that Golden Age and Morning of the World of which the poets have sung even a whiskered man like yourself might suddenly entertain the gods, and hand Pan himself a cheese !

“ Note you also that in those days the Fauns would trip it round the husbandman at his work, and Nymphs bringing lilies in heaped-up baskets, and Naiads plucking pale violets, narcissus, hyacinth, and marigold, would hasten to wreath them around the brow of the farmer, himself leaping for joy and composing bucolic verse suitable to the occasion.”

From a menacing rumble proceeding from the ancient man I understood him to intimate that he would like to catch them at it.

“ Furthermore,” I said, “ the Cytherean herself, and the little pink godlets tumbling about her dove-drawn car, did not disdain in those days to inflame shepherds, goat-herds, and (for all I know) cowmen and pig-herds, and, indeed, all male persons employed pursuant to the several Agricultural (Labour) Acts of that time, with the sweetest and most mellifluous love ; so that every grove resounded with the praise of Amaryllis, of Phyllis, of Neæra, and of I know not what rural beauties. In fact,” I said frankly, “ they had the very devil of a good time on the farm.”

Mr. Gumble preserved a dogged silence.

“Come,” I said, reasoning with the ancient person, “it is not easy for so aged and hairy a man as yourself to break suddenly into song and dance ! Nor do I think that even in those days, when the Nymphs would bring practically anybody a basket of flowers, there would have been a wild rush to decorate *you*. Think how foolish you would have looked with practically all your employees, crowned with roses, dancing round you, hand in hand with satyrs, while some handsome sunburned shepherd played his slender reed ; and you glowering in the middle with just a bit of parsley in your hat that some kind-hearted girl had thrown at you ! And think of the report in the local paper :

“ ‘ FÊTE at HOGSNORTON : An enjoyable afternoon was spent at Hogsnorton on Tuesday, when the fortnightly fête and gala in aid of the Ceres Lodge (No. 59) of the Satyrs’ Mutual Benefit and Friendly Society was held in the grounds of the Gumble estate. We noticed several well-known Nymphs, ægipans, and satyrs among the gathering, which owed much of its success to the efforts of Mr. Mopsus, the genial and efficient secretary. Most of the guests wore the popular vine and rose-leaf decorations, the local ladies being indefatigable in offering the accustomed

floral tributes. A well-attended dance and song festival completed a happy day, which was only marred by the presence of Mr. Elijah Gumble, in parsley, whose features aroused much unfavourable comment, several Nymphs comparing them to a badly harrowed turnip. We understand that this nuisance will be dealt with ere long, and that Mr. Gumble will shortly be turned into a heifer.'”

HYBLA HONEY—BEST AND GOES FURTHEST

“In addition to which,” I said, shaking my head, “you would most probably have had to suffer the humiliation of hearing your own shepherds making songs about you. For example :

MENALCAS

Say, shepherd, why with such extreme affright,
Thy goats do buck, thy silly sheep take flight ?

DAMOETAS

It is because yon far-resounding rumble
Heralds the awful oncoming of *Gumble*.

MENALCAS

It is some time ago, and no denial,
Since agriculture witness'd such a dial !

DAMOETAS

Phyllis, than whom I know of no one nicer,
Thinks that he caught it in a turnip-slicer.

MENALCAS

Delia betrays such wild unreas'ning fear,
I have to clip the girl across the ear.

DAMOETAS

The sight of *Gumble* terror wide hath flung ;
Fishes climb trees, and cows devour their young.

AMBO

But hark ! A nearer roaring shakes the valley !
Shepherds, away ! This is no time to dally !

—whereupon they would trip it for the hills, and when you reached the spot only the flick of a disappearing hoof—*Pfrrt* !—and a high-pitched silvery snigger from the trees would show that the satyrs and dryads were making a fool of you. And, by Hercules, it would avail you nothing to be up and at them with a hayfork ! The very next moment you would find yourself turned into a tree, or a rock, or a spotted wart-hog, with all the woodland people laughing themselves sick.

“You may argue,” I said loudly, “that while the more decorative, clinging, and passionate aspects of Arcadian agriculture would have been a closed book to you, you might have shone in the purely utilitarian field of ploughing, sowing, reaping, breeding hogs and cattle, and generally adhering to the soil. A fatal error ! In the Golden Age they esteemed a handsome face more than a litter of prize

pigs resembling their owner, and a light tenor voice, with a gift for stringing verse, more than a talent for raising mangel-wurzels.

“Better for you, too, Gumble, to refrain from bullying a youthful crow-scarer, or heedlessly banging the lad! He might turn out to be the darling of the Muses and the winner of the last Open Lyric (Gents’ Singles), or perhaps a Dancing Half-Blue. Be sure that you would get into notable trouble with Pan and the authorities! They would hunt you with wild panthers. You would certainly lose your hat and hymn-book. No,” I said thoughtfully, gazing at the darkening Downs, “that age of agricultural ecstasy would not have suited you, my Gumble. Not yours to breathe upon the slender reed by the banks of smooth-sliding Mincius: certainly not yours to toy with Galatea (a gorbacious trollop) as she pelts you with an apple and flies to the willows. In fact, and to sum up——”

Observing Mr. Gumble more closely I perceived that the ancient man was in a trance, and fast asleep where he stood; and even my shaking him to and fro twenty or thirty times, in order to announce my conclusion, did not wake him. So I carefully disposed his arms at right angles, in order to frighten the rooks, and went home, leaving him to the fairies who inhabit those hills.

XV

THE GIRLS' GUIDE

WHEN the learned Thomas Diafoirus courted the fair Angélique he presented her with his new thesis on the circulation of the blood, at the same time inviting her to be present at a forthcoming dissection of a woman, on which he was to lecture. What gallantry ! What verve !

Times change, and manners with them. In that superb age of Louis XIV they gave women splendid treats—ballets and pastoral entertainments, banquets with music, and diamonds. I doubt if it was good for them. It must have turned their heads, all this extravagant gallantry. An occasional kind word, a gentle pat on the head—how much better for a woman than all that costly business ! Eric Strongbow, an iron-jawed, clean-cut, silent he-man of my acquaintance, tells me that one need not really give them anything ; he—you may have met him—merely folds his arms and tightens his jaw, at the same time giving them a half-kindly, half-contemptuous smile, or perhaps lightly spurning them with one foot while he

lights a cigarette. The result is that women fawn on him and eat out of his hand. I think Miss What-'s-her-Name knows Eric too and has brought him into one or two of her books. She has had some imitators, but they do not know Eric—the real Eric—very well. He has never, for example, bitten a lady in his life.

I have been thinking very deeply about these things since I had tea with Miss Ella Eagerley yesterday. Miss Eagerley, of course, is the leader of the well-known movement whose slogan is "Girls! Be Womanly!" and the author of several little books of refinement and uplift, including *Shouts of Strengthening*, *Way-side Whispers*, *Songs of Soothing*, and *Quiet Chats on Gladness*. She also edits the "Under the Tea-Table" column in *The Perfect Lady*. Miss Eagerley has been called (by Dr. Gump) the Great Bounding Woman-Soul of the Age. It is certainly an inspiration to watch the light flashing behind the rimless pince-nez which crown the large, but not oppressive, nose, and to listen to the quick, decisive words of healing which issue from the lips of this womanly thinker. I found her engaged on a new Home Edition of Tennyson, in the act of altering the line—

"Slip into my bosom and be lost in me"

to

"Lean upon my chest, if that be womanly"

and champing her prominent, but not unsightly, teeth.

“ Yes ! ” said Miss Eagerley. “ Our Movement is making headway ! In the home, in the City, even on the stage women are everywhere learning to be truly womanly. You may have seen photographs in *The Pratler* lately of Miss Pansy Snooper, of the Inanity Theatre, leaning over an ailing Ring-Tailed Badger at the Zoo ? That was done at her own request. Another leading actress who has an aged aunt has also been photographed in the act of bending over her, in three distinct groupings. Another, who has had three husbands, spends her evenings in hurrying from one to the other, stroking their heads and repeating to each in turn some little Message from one of my little books, which are published by Garble and Gushing at 3s. 6d. net. For example :

However dark the day and long
I will be strong ! I will be strong !
Yes ! Bounding ever glad and free
I shout with glad hilarity !

Or

I whispered to my Mignonette,
“ Have you a Message, pray ? ”
I shouted to a little bird,
“ What, birdie, do you say ? ”
“ Be womanly ! ” they made reply.
“ Be full of daily power ! ”
And so from day to day I go,
Yes ! And from hour to hour !

“In addition,” said Miss Eagerley with flashing eyes, taking up a weekly journal at her side, “I have an ever-increasing correspondence with my readers in *The Perfect Lady*. Here are some of my Answers to Correspondents :

“ ‘GLADYS F. (Giggleswick).—No, Gladys, if he truly loved you he would not lavish his attentions on a woman Factory-Inspector. But be strong ! Perform your deep-breathing exercises regularly. Get my *Quiet Chats on Gladness*.’

“ ‘ERNEST W. (Dulwich).—You do not say clearly what causes your depression—the love disappointment or the ingrowing toenail. You need a Message, Ernest ! Have you tried my *Wayside Whispers* ?’

“ ‘ ‘ONLY A GIRL.’—You say the cabman was rude when you gave him one of my little booklets in lieu of his fare. Alas ! Did you ask your dear flowers for their Message ? Personally I always give a cabman a pansy, at the same time explaining in a womanly manner the need to grow *upward*.’

“ ‘ETHEL M. (Chirk).—So he gnawed your ear in the dance, Ethel ! I fear he is addicted to foods other than rational, and I doubt if a meat-eater could make you happy. However, you were quite right to perform several deep-breathing exercises, then and there, on the

ballroom floor. Write to me again—I am sympathising with you night and day. Do not forget to enclose sixpence in stamps next time.'

" 'WILFRED W. (Bootle).—No, Wilfred ! You should have removed the glove, or else begged to be excused. Gentlemanly demeanour is not confined to waxing the moustache and carrying a silk handkerchief in the waistband. A true gentleman who respects womanhood, too, will never, never, *never* be seen breathing on a lady's neck. Get my *Shouts of Strengthening*.'

" 'MABEL (Biggleswade).—The correct thing to say, Mabel, is "Allow me to introduce Mr. —, with whom I am walking out." I do not think he could have pushed you over the stairs purposely, so your reply to his apology should have been "Granted as soon as asked !" As to your spottiness, I should try a good varnish. Yes, dear, I am so glad you are being really womanly ! How nice of you to like my *Wayside Whispers*. You must read the others !' "

Miss Eagerley finished reading with a loud snap. I said it was very nice. She gave me a bleak glance and coughed sharply.

"We have also our weekly Tea-Time Cheery Chat for Girls," she said, rapidly turning over-

leaf. "This week we draw a little moral from a film called 'At the Cross-Roads.' I will read you an extract :

" ' Yes, girls, there is no doubt that Alick Stiff loved Mamie, and that she returned his love warmly. But that is no reason why, because of a jealousy tiff, she should

PUT GROUND GLASS IN HIS FOOD

and have him sandbagged by thugs. Is that a womanly act ? Hardly ! A quiet talk with Alick would have dispelled her doubts, and although in that case we should not have seen

THE DEATH STRUGGLE IN THE DOPE DEN,

everything would have been much nicer. There seems no doubt that Mamie was a hasty girl, and it is evident that the Mexican Lopez must have been highly incensed with her to seize her and try to

THROTTLE HER BEHIND THE PIANO,

happily without success. Oh, girls, I do want to warn you against hasty judgment, against unwomanly actions, against extravagance such as Mamie displayed ; for what is an elephant parade in the drawing-room but sheer heedless luxury ? And finally——'

“ You’re not going ? ” said Miss Eagerley suddenly.

“ I’m so sorry,” I said. “ I have arteriosclerosis.” So saying I pressed Miss Eagerley warmly by the hand and made my way out through the advancing horde of the faithful.

XVI

BY NUMBERS

ON such a day as this, my little ones—a burning blue August day, with the golden cornfields hardly whispering in the stillness of noon and a drowsy sound of bees in the air—on such a day it is pleasant to lie on some thymy sun-kissed hill in Sussex and meditate on the undoubted fact that only a few leagues away, over the Hampshire border, Mr. Sidney Webb, President of the Board of Trade* and author of *Industrial Democracy*, *Problems of Modern Industry*, *English Poor-Law Policy*, *History of Liquor Licensing*, and other works of passion and ecstasy, is also solacing himself from the cares of State with a country holiday. Bring, Nymphs, fresh Blue-books! And you, sunburnt rustic deities, prepare new statistics! But let us have no drunkenness and no revelry, but only that which is done neatly and in strict order, while on the grass the well-clothed Fauns trip to a Fabian song.

Musing a long time (not without tears) on this and endeavouring to evoke within my

-* Not now. Alas!

quaking mind the spectacle of Mr. Sidney Webb crowned with rose leaves at some country festival, I naturally began next to think of that rural feast which Grandgousier gave on the day when the great Gargantua was born. To this feast (as you know) all the burghers of Sainnais were invited, as well as those of Suillé, of Roche-Clermaud, of Vaugaudray, of Coudray, of Montpensier, and of Gué-de-Vede; and after feasting they went pell-mell to the Grove of Willows, where on the green grass they danced to the sound of merry flageolets and sweet bagpipes, so joyously (says the misguided Rabelais) that it was a heavenly pleasure to see them frolic so—" *c'estoit passe-temps celeste les voir ainsi soy rigoller.*"

Alas! How unproductive! How economically wasteful! How far removed from the glorious ideals of the Industrial State! We (Mr. Webb and myself) would not have deprived these citizens of reasonable recreation; but how much better, my friends, to have had them, each labelled and clothed in a neat combination suit of official grey, capering in unison at the direction of a State Controller of Joy! It makes us sick to think of those careless, wasteful ages before Manchester became what she is to-day: a glory to mankind.

I mentioned this yesterday to Professor Dog-

body, one of the most earnest Fabians I know—the famous Dogbody who was thrown out of the Folies-Bergère for shouting in a loud voice “Is this Co-Operation?” He told me that in Spain, in Italy, in France, and even in some parts of England this passion on the part of the producing and consuming classes alike for uncontrolled revelry (especially in agricultural districts) still exists.

“Tck, tck,” I said sympathetically.

“Happily,” said the Professor, producing a sheaf of blue papers, “I have had some opportunity of putting into practice in the village of Hogsnorton, where I have been living for that purpose, the principles so admirably set forth in Euphemia Polk’s *Need Joy Be Unconfined? A Plea for Rational Amusement in the Co-Operative Commonwealth*. The inhabitants at first, indeed, stubbornly refused to evince Joy on the days I set apart for that purpose, but I was determined that these days should be observed. With the aid of a capable Committee, including Mrs. Struggles, Professor Bodger, Miss Volumnia Bibb, Mrs. Martha Dillson Dudbody, of Athens, Pa., and Canon Boom, we examined and assessed every inhabitant of the village individually, afterwards classifying them as follows:

“CLASS A (Joy-value 40 per cent.).—Fit for general joy-making, including such specified

occupation as laughing, dancing, and any other approved by the Committee's Controller.

"CLASS B (Joy-value 30 per cent.).—Fit for moderate joy-making, including the specified occupations in Class A.

"CLASS C (Joy-value 20 per cent.).—Fit for light or sedentary joy, such as songs in the Co-Operative Commonwealth Official Song Book, to be sung at the Controller's discretion.

"CLASS D (Joy-value .5 per cent.).—Totally incapacitated for any kind of organised joy whatsoever.

"Among this last class," continued Professor Dogbody, trumpeting through his nose, "were, I regret to say, several aged and hairy men of agricultural occupation who not only refused point-blank to be gay when requested peremptorily to do so by my Committee, but added mutinously that they would be gormed if they did. Canon Boom at once replied by having them drawn up in a line and ordering them to sing in chorus the Laughing Song (No. 98 A) from the Official Song Book, which goes :

We are so merry and gay, tra la,
 We laugh and dance and sing :
 Controlled in every way, tra la,
 And drilled in everything.
 All non-productive gladness we
 Unanimously spurn ;
 Our breasts with mass hilarity
 Co-operatively burn !

CHORUS, TO BE SUNG WHILE DANCING—SEE CHART
PP. 87-89, SEC. 23 (A) (I.).

Tra la tra la tra la tra la !
Hooray hooray hooray !
Huzza huzza huzza huzza !
Three cheers for Sidney Webb !

“ And on their again refusing (this time with rural oaths) to evince gaiety and move their limbs in the dance in the manner prescribed, we had them at once expelled from the village. It is now a pleasure to a serious and well-nourished mind,” said the Professor with strong emotion, “ to observe our weekly festival. One-two. One-two. Should any inhabitant neglect to smile on these occasions he (or she) is at once placed in solitary confinement with all the recent Blue-books pertaining to Local Government and the Factory Acts, and on a second offence soundly beaten. Here, indeed, is the Ideal State ! ”

“ Indeed, indeed yes,” I said fervently.

There was a pause.

“ You spoke just now of Rabelais,” said Professor Dogbody, coughing slightly. “ You may be interested to know—possibly the public might be interested to know—that I have been asked by Mr. Eustace Smiles——”

We both raised our hats reverently.

“ —to bring out a new Vegetarian Edition of

Rabelais. It is our belief that the substitution of nut-dishes and various proteid-containing foods (such as tapioca, Meggo, and Gloxo) for the various rich meat and flesh foods which form the extensive banquets over which this writer gloats to such a great extent in his works would not only improve their tone but make them a definite power for Good. At the same time we feel that his extravagant praise of wine (such as the wine called Chinon Grillé), if directed so as to praise instead the virtues of Milko, or some such beverage rich in vitamines, would materially assist our Movement; for a nut diet does not heat the blood or minister to the baser passions."

So saying, Professor Dogbody, after performing a few deep-breathing exercises, grasped his umbrella firmly and went away.

But I remained for some time revolving many things, observing the disorderly arrangement of the trees, the untidy luxury of the hedgerows, the uneven skyline of the great Downs above me, the ragged flight of the rooks going home with such hoarse and uncoördinated cries, the imperfect alignment, far away through a gap in the hills, of the long waves which rolled and broke on the shingle. Such things are distressing to a trained and tidy mind. I contemplated Nature for a little time

very coldly and unfavourably through an eyeglass, with pursed mouth, just like a Fabian who might be, by some mischance, caught suddenly up to Paradise ; and then I went home to tea.

XVII

THE LION'S WHELPS

Written at the request of Major-General Sir Rollo Bludyer-Briskett, C.B. (retired), who complained to me of the D——D Wishy-Washy Stuff now flooding the English Stage, and particularly of the dearth of Good Patriotic Drama.

THE HONOUR OF THE PINK

GENERAL IRONBLOOD

CAPTAIN STRONGBOW

COLONEL STEELFACE

LIEUT. DITHERING

MAJOR BANGS

TROOPER DASHLEY

and

SONIA KRUSCHENOFF

THE scene is the mess-room of the Pink Hussars in a frontier fort in the Himalayas. The fort is besieged by hordes of wild tribesmen, and ever and anon a shower of assegais, spears, knobkerrys, and poisoned arrows whistles through the windows of the mess, where the officers are carousing with true British nonchalance.

GENERAL IRONBLOOD, however, is not at table. With a furrowed brow and sternly set jaw he strides up and down ; and each time he passes the regimental plate the general draws himself up stiff and salutes, clicking his heels together.

CAPTAIN STRONGBOW leaves his comrades and joins the general.

CAPTAIN STRONGBOW : You are *distract* to-night, General.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*hoarsely*) : Yes, my boy. From secret information I have received I learn that the fort is in danger. In five hours we shall be cut off. (*In a clarion voice.*) The honour of the regiment—aye, of England—is in our hands.

A MESS WAITER (*to Gen. Ironblood*) : Port or burgundy, sir ?

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*saluting*) : For Eng——
What ? Port.

As they all stand saluting a human head whizzes through the window and is removed on a salver by the Mess Waiter.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*ignoring it*) : Gentlemen !
To your posts ! The Regiment !

Three hearty British cheers. The officers flourish their swords and file out, saluting.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*to LIEUT. DITHERING*) :
Wilfred !

LIEUT. DITHERING (*wincing*) : Yes, General ?

GEN. IRONBLOOD : Are you an officer and a gentleman ?

LIEUT. DITHERING (*springing to attention*): Yes, General.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*peevishly*): Then why have you sold the plans of this fort to the agent of a Foreign Power?

LIEUT. DITHERING: General, I have lost large sums at play. I was in the hands of a money-lender—a Mr. Donald McHaggis. I should have been cashiered—ruined! (*In a low voice.*) And I love Sonia Kruschenoff.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*gnawing his moustache*): Aye, boy, but what of England?

Draws his sword and salutes.

LIEUT. DITHERING (*unconsciously drawing his sword*): England!

They give three cheers and salute again.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*sheathing his sword*): Go, unhappy boy! It is too late to do aught but die! (*Coughs.*) Have you a flag?

LIEUT. DITHERING: No, sir.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*thoughtfully*): We might have waved it. However, Go! Join your comrades. Show the world that all is not lost, and that the courage which nerves a British Officer, even in desperate straits, does not . . . is not . . . (*Coughs.*) Anyhow, go!

LIEUT. DITHERING: It is not too late to send despatches, General.

GEN. IRONBLOOD: But who will take them?

LIEUT. DITHERING : Why, Alfred Dashley. Trooper Alfred Dashley, of the (*he salutes*) Pink Hussars ! He will save the honour of the Regiment.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*in a ringing voice*) : And of England !

They draw swords once more and give a cheer. Enter Trooper Alfred Dashley.

DASHLEY (*saluting*) : Good evening, General.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*saluting*) : Good evening, Alfred. You are not, I believe, the ordinary trooper you seem ?

DASHLEY : No, General. I am the eldest son of Lord Snooper.

All three salute at the words " Lord Snooper."

GEN. IRONBLOOD : Good ! Here are despatches. Ride quickly.

DASHLEY (*hoarsely*) : Yes, General.

*Salutes all round. Dashley goes out.
Enter Sonia Kruschenoff.*

SONIA : Good evening, General. Wilfred, can I have more plans ?

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*warningly*) : Wilfred !

LIEUT. DITHERING (*in a muffled voice*) : No, Sonia.

SONIA (*surprised*) : Why ?

LIEUT. DITHERING : The Regiment, Sonia !

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*saluting*) : England ! (*To SONIA*) : Back, girl !

SONIA : General ! Would you strike a woman ?

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*veiling his eyes*) : Yes. For the sake of England !

Salutes and strikes Sonia.

Enter Trooper Dashley, hastily.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*hoarsely*) : Well ? What news ?

DASHLEY : Where are the despatches to be delivered ?

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*angrily*) : Is this a time to dally ? Go !

Salutes as usual. DASHLEY goes out. Gun-fire without. The hill tribes rush the fort. Yells. Oaths. Hand-to-hand fighting. The Pink Hussars drive the enemy out, saluting GENERAL IRONBLOOD as they pass him. The General, standing at attention, returns all salutes.

SONIA : General ! Here are the plans. I cannot rob a brave man !

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*warmly*) : Quite right. Quite right.

Salutes Sonia.

SONIA : Not at all.

A horse gallops up, and Trooper Dashley flings himself to the ground and salutes.

GEN. IRONBLOOD : Well ?

DASHLEY (*gasping*) : There was nobody in.
Faints.

GEN. IRONBLOOD : So this is the end !
Unless help arrives in half an hour all is lost.

LIEUT. DITHERING (*quickly*) : Save honour, General !

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*much annoyed*) : I was going to say that.

Fresh attacks from the hill tribes. They are driven back once more.

DASHLEY (*in a faint voice*) : General !

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*with emotion*) : Yes, my brave fellow ? You have something to say ?
Bends over him.

DASHLEY : Have you an aspirin ?

GEN. IRONBLOOD : Pah !
Strides up and down.

LIEUT. DITHERING : If all is lost, what shall we do ?

GEN. IRONBLOOD : You, Wilfred, will draw

your sword and rally round me. I too will draw. Where are the others? Call them in!

Dithering does so.

GEN. IRONBLOOD (*saluting*): Gentlemen!
The Regiment!

Three hearty cheers.

Honour is safe! The plans are here.

Everybody salutes.

For England!

*A tense moment. The drums and fifes
of the relief force are heard through
the window.*

Enter a mess waiter.

The MESS WAITER (*to* GEN. IRONBLOOD):
Brandy and soda, sir?

*But the General is at the salute and
cannot take it.*

*The Pink Hussars, stiffly at attention,
sing "Rule, Britannia!"*

OMNES: England!

General Salute.

THE END

XVIII

A TRIAL FLIGHT

IT is impossible for a man of any sensibility to live for long in the English countryside without experiencing the liveliest emotions of innocence and virtue. To gaze (as Mrs. Pumkin so truly says) upon the features of a cow, to join the leaping shepherds at their play, to pluck a simple daisy from the bough, is better than in Vice's path to stray. And so, while you in the town are dancing in night clubs, watering stock in the City, blackmailing very rich men, cheating at Bridge, overdrawing at the Bank, and enjoying other dubious and often harmful pleasures, here am I in this little village under the Downs listening to the cuckoo, contemplating very old and whiskered men, and improving and enlarging my mind with all the processes of Nature.

There are, it is true, set-backs. The shepherds are not in full song, for example: and that reminds me that Alfred Lord Tennyson, when he wrote the lines

Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height ;
What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang),

In height and cold, the splendour of the hills ?
But cease to move so near the Heavens, and cease
To glide a sunbeam by the blasted Pine . . .

made an error which proves him ignorant of country life. A shepherd would not say "blasted." He would say "dommed," perhaps, or "gorbacious"; a milder expletive altogether. It is, indeed, no wonder that an equerry waited on Mr. Tennyson (as he then was) to express the regret felt in Exalted Circles that such an *undignified* word should have crept into his distinguished verse; if indeed such an incident did happen.

But a slightly deeper regret to me than the songlessness of the shepherds is the lack of dramatic material in the lives of the inhabitants. No Enoch Arden returns, bronzed, bowed, and covered with whiskers, to find his wife has married someone else. No rural lover rushes into a thicket to weep and hang a sonnet on every tree; nor does he celebrate the beloved's cruelty in suicide. I doubt if the Rectory, even, has contributed its mite to the Gaiety (and other) choruses, as other English rectories do. We have, it is true, a cloud, a lark, a daisy, such as Mr. Wordsworth noticed in the Lake District, but we have no old man with swollen ankles whom we might exploit in a stanza or two. On the other hand we have a literary man with a

swollen head ; but though I began yesterday some " Lines written in Dejection, on Encountering Mr. ——," they hardly seem to me to have the authentic Wordsworth ring :

I wandered with a happy shout
Across the hills and vales and things
When all at once I met a Tout
Of sinister imaginings.
A literary Man, no less,
Of loathing and disgustfulness.
How often, when with vacant air,
I fumble with a stud,
Or take my little porringer,
And fill it full of mud,
I think upon that village Child
Who made the Wordsworth man so wild !
The Child who burbled " We are seven,"
Had never been to school ;
It talked to William about Heaven
And made him look a Fool.
Had I that simple skill, ah, then
How I would harass Pompous Men !
Now oft when on my couch I lie
In pensive, pious mood,
Thinking of rope, and rugs, and rye,
At 30 omsks per pood,
I long to dye his whiskers blue,
And boil his Sunday hat in glue,
And have him bitten by a gnu,
And fill his boots with barley brew,
Roughcast, and rolling-pins, and rue,
And curl his hair with cogs from Crewe,
Where all is beautiful and true,
And, like that very tedious Jew
Spinoza, mutter loudly " Pooh ! "—
If that would not be rude.

I cannot pretend that this is worthy of a place next to, say, the Sonnet Composed on Westminster Bridge; but I do put it forward as evidence that continued contact with cows and trees does inspire a kind of lyric poetry in a thoughtful man of blameless life; in fact, my Muse—an excellent female, but a little weak in the chest—it was for her sake chiefly that I came into the country—rather enjoyed her trial flight under new conditions.

I said to my Muse to-day: "Come! Do you think that in this vernal air, and amid these scenes of pastoral tranquillity, you will be able to undertake those higher flights which, I understand, you have always boasted yourself capable of making under favourable conditions?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said my Muse coldly.

"Recollect," I said warmly, "that other Muses have not your advantages. Why, the Muse of Mr. ——"—I mentioned a poet of wide popularity—"the Muse of Mr. —— never leaves town, and yet look at her output! What are you sniffing at?"

My Muse said she had a cold in the head.

"Come," I said, "let us hear a little something. Put yourself to the trifling inconvenience of awaking and soaring, if it is only a few yards. See how the shafts of light from the setting sun strike down the valley and gild

the hills ! Observe the intense peace, the clear evening sky ! Flying conditions are ideal. Come ! ”

At these words my Muse, observing crossly that the evening air would be the death of her, but that I would have only myself to blame, said “ Pastoral ? ” And on my nodding, but without enthusiasm, she obliged me with the following lines :

Here in this village fifty years ago,
The miller's daughter, little Nancy Lee,
And Henry Stubbs, the blacksmith's only son,
And Abel Higgs, a sturdy ploughman's lad,
Play'd in the street. Nancy was fairly fat,
And Henry fatter, but the fattest there
Was Abel Higgs. My hat ! The lad was stout !
Shaped like a globe, with feet he never saw,
And rolling like a football down the hills !
And Nancy loved him for it.

Till one day——

“ How does it end ? ” I said, stifling a yawn.

“ She marries Abel,” said my Muse. “ He then goes away to sea as a lifebuoy or something and she marries Henry Stubbs. Then many years after Abel returns and tries to get at Henry Stubbs, but of course he can't get through the door. So he has to have a special shed, or hangar, built outside. They get a lot of visitors from Brighton in the summer, of course.”

I said, "It sounds to me exactly like something Tennys——"

"*All* right," said my Muse snappishly, "ask me again, that's all. Ask me again. A poor girl," said my Muse, bursting into tears, "has got enough to do, being in a weak state of health and hardly able to walk, without being put upon at all hours to work by those that call themselves gentlemen, though you'd think a gentleman would have more consideration; but it's always the same, and those that think they've got the upper hand will find out some day, and not so very long either, and then they'll wish they'd treated a person with more consideration."

So saying my Muse went into hysterics and I gave her four days off. The poor girl deserves it; as you will agree.

XIX

OF RAIN ; OF RONCESVALLES ; AND OF A PROBLEM OF CONDUCT

THERE are 6,843 ways of spending a rainy day in London or Paris. Many people (and they are right) think that there are worse places than the National Gallery in which to pass five minutes when caught in a shower, and I know an artist fellow Chelsea way who was once driven into the Tate during a thunderstorm. He was eventually picked up by an attendant under, I think, the late Mr. Watts's "Justice Handing Enlightenment to Debenham and Freebody" or some such allegorical piece, and was ordered by his doctor to the south of France permanently ; to the comfort of his friends and the lasting benefit of British Art.

When it rains in London (or Paris), again, one may go to a recital or a theatre—though the *baignoires* at the Comédie-Française are ill-adapted for a nap, even when they are playing Corneille—or a kinema, or a meeting of the Fabian Society, or the Cirque de Paris, or any fashionable wedding, or the Zoo, or a

thousand other blameless and exhilarating places. I know a stockbroker who once had to take refuge in a church ; but that day (as he explains) he was wearing a new silk hat.

In the country, when it rains and rains, a man can only stay indoors or go for a walk. If he has plenty of the right kind of books he need never get out of his chair except to go to bed ; but if he has not, Heaven help him ! I once had a friend, a mild and amiable creature, who found himself one pouring day in a remote cottage with only the poems of Mr. — to read. The result was that he got soaked to the skin, took a morbid fever, and hanged himself from a beam ; and his ghost gave a lot of trouble in its sniffing, whimpering way till it was assoiled and quieted the other day by a Franciscan from over the hill. Therefore, any wise man about to live for any period in the country will look to his books and choose them with care against the rainy day. As to those proud, strong, hairy men who go masterfully striding out in the rain and exposing their knotted chests to the blast, I have nothing to say. Cows do the same, and so do wart-hogs, steam-rollers, gipsies, Fabians (except on a cold or wet day), and mongrel dogs. Why make a song about it ? as the *Sieur Hacqlebac de Buzançay* said when he kicked *Zinzolin* the minstrel round the town of *Dax* for comparing

his nose, in a Chant Royal, to a *bota*, or Spanish wine gourd.

For myself, when it rains in the country, I commend the agricultural population to Providence and find solace in strong tobacco and red-blooded books ; that is to say, books full of roaring and the winds, of violence and loud song, of swords and tall ships, of wine and hot sunshine, of steel and trumpets. Such are the *Song of Roland*, the Five Books of *Pantagruel*, the *Morte d'Arthur*, some of the plays of Webster and Ben Jonson and the Elizabethans (which are more full of blood than wine), and *Tom Jones*. As for the puling, sickly, neurotic, Freudian, namby-pamby, introspective, snivelling, complex-ridden, wire-drawn, decomposing, O-how-daring, pasty, thin-blooded, cleverish, peevish, mingle-mangle stuff they print nowadays, I would not throw it at a Higher Thoughtist, let alone give it to a Christian. A few months ago I went on a pilgrimage through Europe to see the place in that high, dark pass of the Pyrenees where Roland fell, and Oliver, and all the Peers of France ; it is on the way from Pampeluna to Val Carlos ; a terrible place, with woundy high rocks and furious waterfalls, inhabited, I think, by devils. Would you go days and nights of travelling to see the place where Martha Goofing was overcome by the Jocasta-complex,

in a first-floor flat in West Kensington? Or the room in Chelsea where Hyacinth Purble, after a terrific struggle with his nasty little soul, gave it up after a double absinthe? If you would, I beg that you will take your hat and go out quietly. No. Not at all. It is just an unfortunate mistake. The morgue is next door. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Yesterday it rained heavily, persistently, doggedly, stupefyingly, and damnably, like Lord Boreham making a speech on Diocesan Finance in the Upper House. A veil of thick mist hung about my Downs and the soaked fields, and the birds who make my village a Singing Island were silent, or at least reduced to one chirrup an hour. I therefore took down from a shelf and read with great relish a volume of plays of the Elizabethan Have-at-You School, and by lunch time I was up to the doublet in gore. And that reminds me of a Problem of Conduct which I should like to propound to you. It would probably arise very rarely to-day, but it must have worried a sixteenth-century Venetian considerably. Here it is :

A, a stranger to Venice, is invited by B, a noble of that place, to a banquet. Owing to unforeseen circumstances A arrives late, and

does not meet his host B or his hostess C until he is actually shown into the dining-room. On entering he finds D, a noble with whom he has a slight acquaintance, lying on the floor with a dagger in his breast ; E, F, and G, all nobles of whom he has heard B speak slightly, leaning on the table with every appearance of having been poisoned in their wine ; H, the charming daughter of the house, being strangled at the sideboard by a masked stranger ; and I and J, the two sons of B, conducting a duel with knives in the window.

As A is announced B rises from table and says coldly, " Why are you late ? We were looking forward to seeing you at seven." A's hostess, C, says nothing, but stealthily draws a stiletto from her stocking.

A does not know either B or C very well, and he is by nature shy and retiring, though a gentleman.

What should A do ?

I think that is a very sound and satisfactory problem, well up to *British Weekly* standard. Among the answers already adjudged incorrect is that of my friend the Squire, who says that A should kick B smartly in the stomach, at the same time deftly upper-cutting C, and then run like blazes. I think he has missed the essential point that A is a gentleman. Another answer

adjudged incorrect is that A should take a bomb from his pocket and, first uttering a courteous word of greeting and apology, throw it into the mob and leg it downstairs for dear life. This, again, fails, because a man of breeding of the Renaissance would not blow his hostess—whom he hardly knows at all—into little bits merely to cover an awkward pause in the conversation. Should A advance, keeping an eye on C's stiletto, with some such laughing phrase as "What a lot of bodies!" or "How the evenings are drawing in!"? Should he ignore the whole business and take his seat at table, chatting to his host about San Marco, or the Lido, or the Doge's new economic policy concerning coastwise trade? (He would, of course, politely refuse wine, saying that his doctor had told him that it was death to him; which would be, in the circumstances, strictly true.) And, even if he got clear of dinner, what about the bravoos lurking downstairs? Should he cut his way through or join them and go fifty-fifty in the loot?

What a problem! How our ancestors, who liked a dash of blood with their drama, must have loved such! Long after the ladies have gone upstairs (you can hear Mistress Celia singing one of that clever Mr. Shakespeare's new songs at the virginals, and somebody is tuning a lute) they sit at table, passing the

burnt sack and canary round and round and discussing what A should do, while the air is full of words like "'Sdeath!" and "Marry!" and "Odds my life!" One or two of them are already under the table, and around the heads of all of them we see the halos with which kind Mr. Kingsley provided all Elizabethans—unless, of course, they were recusants. . . .

A merry scene. Let us leave them to it; firstly, because we must think our solution out very carefully, and, secondly, because it has stopped raining and we are going out with our dog.

XX

SALUTE TO AGRICULTURISTS

Though no Calabrian bees their honey yield
For me, nor mellowing sleeps the god of wine
In Formian jar, nor in Gaul's pasture-field
The wool grows long and fine.
Yet poverty ne'er comes to break my peace. . . .

THUS Horace, that poet, in praise of his little farm and the simple, innocent lives led by agriculturists from the Golden Age down. He saw the honest fellows trudging up and down with their hair full of hay, sowing their seed, ploughing their land, banging their wives, dancing round the harvest, and generally putting to shame the wicked dwellers in town ; and as one of the very first literary men to infest the countryside he probably wore false whiskers and a smock and tried to make the natives join in folk-song, as Mr. — does in Sussex this very day. But what Horace either did not know about agriculturists, or else suppressed as spoiling the picture, was the great primal basic fact that they are for ever being ruined ; ruined by sunshine, ruined by rain, ruined by clear weather, ruined by dull weather,

ruined by spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The unfortunate wurzel-fanciers !

Last night I dined with the Squire, and after dinner we sat toying with a very suave and sacred port and talking about Millerand and hats and sailing-boats and Buddhism and bees and wine and gramophones, in a scented dusk—for the windows were open—with the candle-light gleaming softly on fruit and silver and old oak. And as we were discussing banking and Augustus John there came a sudden flurry of rain, and a heavy storm broke from over the hills just as the Squire was saying “ There’s a little something by De la Mare which——”

He paused and said in a hollow voice, gazing out of the window, “ Rain ! I’m a ruined man.”

“ Yes,” I said. “ I know the little thing you mean. It’s in *Peacock Pie*. ”

“ All my hay,” said the Squire simply. “ A hundred tons of it. And look at the rain ! Ruined.” He groaned slightly and added that the brokers would probably be in within a week.

“ Can I have the little water-colour over the bookshelf ? ” I asked. “ Before they sack the place, I mean.”

The Squire groaned again, and went on talking about Disraeli. Next morning, a delicious morning, with the sun blazing in a cloudless sky, I reminded him about the water-colour. He said the sun might stave off ruin

if it didn't burn up the something-or-other crop, and at breakfast he was comparatively cheerful and light-hearted, and talking of buying a new pianola and reaping machines. At lunch-time he appeared thoughtful.

"Ruined again?" I said sympathetically.

He said the absence of rain would play the very devil with something whose name I forget. It drizzled at tea-time, and he came in with what I thought a jaunty air, from which I gathered that the last day in the old home was postponed for a week at least. The sun came out at 5.30, went in at 7, came out at 7.30, and retired at 8.15. By bedtime there was a sea-mist and thick rain, and my unhappy friend came into my room and said he would be in the workhouse within a week.

"It's all over, is it?" I said, looking up from my novel.

"Unless we get some sun to-morrow," he said, lighting a Corona with a sigh.

"It's a good job," I said thoughtfully, "you're being ruined so continuously, or you mightn't be able to afford the new car, might you?"

He started a little at this, and said indignantly that when he was roofless, foodless, and in rags, the week after next, I might regret my lack of human feeling. I pointed out that he could live in the new car and wear the expensive

rugs which accompanied it. "And as for food," I argued, "some of us can always buzz a bone or a loaf through the windows. We could score hits."

He gave me a look of dignified pain and went downstairs. I heard him whistling a tune from *Stop Flirting*. So much for that agriculturist.

But when all is said and done (as Egopompus of Melos remarked to the torturers as they turned him over) the life of the agriculturist is a sweet and pleasant one. There is nothing to be said against (e.g.) the life of a chartered accountant. Many chartered accountants are really good men. There is no doubt that women love them passionately and that they are kind to their young; and they frequently dazzle the imagination of the romantic of both sexes by wearing spats.

Architects, again, are men of virtuous life to a large extent. On the bosom (if the word may be allowed) of an architect any woman may lay her head without incurring censure or contumely. The same applies to quantity surveyors and makers of poultry appliances (wholesale). I have likewise never heard a word spoken against die-sinkers and relief-stampers, and I believe that actuaries and egg-brokers are also highly spoken of. And no

man, I think, has ever questioned the integrity of inspectors of wood-paving and lived.

But in the features of those engaged in the pursuit of agriculture there is (so far as can be ascertained behind the fringe of whisker which is the emblem and sign-manual of their happy art) such a glowing, artless, innocent, shining integrity that I cannot contemplate any aged agriculturist without tears. This cannot be said of a stockbroker; though I am informed that since the passing of the Stock Exchange (Improvement) Act of 1886 it is no longer considered a disgrace for a good girl to dally with a member of the Stock Exchange. As to jobbers and outside brokers I cannot say. One does not, at any rate, dwell on the thought.

How different is the case of the girl who loves an agriculturist! "Is she good enough for him?" is the question that springs instinctively to the lips, and so often, alas! must be answered in the negative. There is a fine old Scots ballad which paints very vividly the anguish and distress of a girl who had rashly aspired to such a union without possessing the lofty virtues necessary for that state in life. It is called "The Pookit Lug," and begins:

O Mither, Mither, wad ye gar
Sae owkie pits the grushlie sair,
Gin snoopies ken o' a' awa'
Ayont an' canty hafflins mair!

I dare say you will not understand that, but it means, roughly, that the girl is upbraiding her mother (whom she calls "Mither"—I do not know why; the "i" is hard and short, as in "zither" or "pantechnicon") for not bringing her up to pit the grushlie so (or "sae") owkie. A grushlie is a kind of misconception or assertion, and also a thing for mashing the lumps in oatmeal porridge. To pit is to waver uncertainly between two points, or to refuse an object such as a bootjack. Owkie means to be in a state of recurrent whoodling. A snoopie is a mental effort made to circumscribe or delimit something—e.g. when one ignores a ladder. And I am afraid "canty" and "hafflins" will convey nothing to you, except that one would rather not be caught in the Grampians without one. The essence of the whole verse is "No wedding bells for her."

The second verse is such that many people trying to say the first line have blown their teeth out. It begins

Wha hae ye whaur the ha' o' Hawe ?

and is the cause of many complaints about being breathed on. I am afraid we cannot discuss this fascinating ballad further. It has fifty-six verses, each full of words like "cleuchty" and "snashwaupit," and the con-

clusion brings us back to where we started—namely, that the agricultural character, though exposed to continuous and persistent ruin, is of such a simple nobility that one can ask its possessor to meet almost anybody.

XXI

NEWS FROM CYPRUS

CYPRUS :—(3,584 sq. m., pop. 275,000) Brit. isl. in the Levant ; grtst. lngth. 140 m., grtst. wdth. 60 m. ; salt lakes, rock-crystal, asbestos, copper, etc. ; cap. Nicosia ; chf. port Larnaca ; centre of wine-trde. Limasol.

“The inhabitants were given much to pleasure and dissipation.”—LEMPRIÈRE.

CONSIDER very carefully the information which I have been at some pains to gather and set out above. Consider also that the old gods are fled, and that Pan (as was revealed to the pilot of that tall ship so long ago, as he sailed through the Cyclades, by a terrible voice which called thrice upon Thamoun and ordered him to carry the news) is dead. Having meditated on these things consider next this paragraph from a news agency which has just caught my eye :

“LAWLESS SHEPHERDS

“Describing the measures being taken in Cyprus to reduce and control the number of goats grazing in the forests in the island, by which destructive animals great damage is done to seedlings and young trees, a Colonial Office report states

‘The lawlessness of the shepherds adds considerably to the difficulties of the forest administration, but it is hoped to overcome their instinctive opposition by the tactful exercise of a spirit of reasoned compromise.’”

“It is hoped. . . .” As Ruskin says in a noble passage, “By Gum it is !” I will not repeat here what has been said about the shepherds of Cyprus by Strabo, by Pliny, and by Pomponius Mela ; firstly because it would probably not interest you, and secondly because I do not know (or care) what they said. But we may recollect that the island gave birth to Venus surnamed *Cypris*, and that she, the rosy-fingered one, had two celebrated temples there, besides innumerable altars. And you may bet your boots (to quote Walter Pater) that the Cyprian shepherds were there, tootling on their pipes and dancing round with their goats and a chorus of nymphs, while the hairy satyrs looked on like old gentlemen in the front row of stalls at a revue. The descendants of these lawless agriculturists are the men on whom the Colonial Office hopes to exercise a spirit of reasoned compromise. If we had administered the island of Cyprus in the morning of the world no doubt we should have been hoping then as well.

I see before me (the date is 5000 B.C.) a report of the Court of Assize of Her Cyprian Majesty, at which one Kallikrates, a shepherd, was arraigned for that he, on the 9th ult., did wilfully, maliciously, and with felonious intent prevent and obstruct Mr. H. J. Smith, an officer of the Forest Administration of the Protectorate, in the execution of his lawful duty. Mr. Justice Rhadamanthus was on the Bench, and a number of nymphs and satyrs were charged with aiding and abetting the defendant. Mr. Smith was called and sworn.

MR. PHŒNIX (for the prosecution): Your name is Mr. Henry John Smith?

WITNESS: Yes.

MR. PHŒNIX: Formerly of Upper Norwood, and now an inspector of the Forest Administration of the Cyprian Protectorate?

WITNESS: That is so.

MR. PHŒNIX: Pray tell the Court in your own words, Mr. Smith, what happened on the day in question.

WITNESS: My Lord, at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, the 9th ult., I was proceeding through the Forest to make the quarterly inventory of young saplings, when in the first clearing by the altar of Jupiter Tonans I saw the defendant, accompanied by several ladies and a number of satyrs, engaged in dancing round the trees.

I requested him to move away, and he replied, "You go to Hades!" I requested him again to move away. He became very abusive and addressed threats to me in the native language. The ladies, too, were abusive, and one of them called me a hog-faced gazeka. On my third request that they should move on and take their goats away from the young trees several of the satyrs kicked me. Eventually I became unconscious.

MR. MINOS (for the defence): You say the ladies abused you, Mr. Smith. Would it surprise you to learn that they are members of the best Cyprian families?

WITNESS: They did not behave as such. They had practically no clothes on, except a few roses.

MR. MINOS: That is not the custom of Upper Norwood?

WITNESS: Certainly not!

MR. MINOS: Did you address them at all?

WITNESS: Yes. I considered it my duty to address them at some length. I pointed out to them that such laxity and impropriety of behaviour formed no part of the domestic life of a British Court, and that any British matron, from the highest to the lowest, would scorn to be seen leaping so lightly clad in company with persons with goats' hoofs. While I was thus engaged they danced round me singing,

and one of the ladies kicked off my hat—a bowler.

MR. MINOS : Now as to the shepherds, Mr. Smith. I believe you have several complaints against them as well ?

WITNESS : Yes. I am always having trouble with them, and I regret to say that the local authorities appear to screen them. The other day, while rebuking a number of shepherds who were holding a kind of drinking festival in the woods, I found myself suddenly changed into a tree. I think it was done by a lady who suddenly appeared from the sky in a chariot drawn by doves. She was surrounded by a number of winged juveniles. I do not know her name.

MR. MINOS : Would it surprise you to learn, Mr. Smith, that the lady was no other than the Lady Venus herself ?

WITNESS : I could not say. She seemed a Frenchified sort of person.

THE JUDGE : You say you were changed into a tree. What kind of tree ?

WITNESS : A weeping willow, my Lord. On regaining my proper shape two days later I at once drew up a report in triplicate.

MR. MINOS : You averted your eyes and offered her Ladyship your mackintosh, I think ?

THE JUDGE : What is a mackintosh ?
(*Laughter.*) Any relation to a sackbut ? (*Loud*

laughter.) You offered it to the Lady Venus in a friendly, but firm manner, I take it, Mr. Smith?

WITNESS: I did, my Lord. She was dressed in a manner more suited to the Continental stage than the open air. It was not respectable.

MR. MINOS: She at once changed you into a tree. Has any official action followed, Mr. Smith?

WITNESS: Yes. Sir Amphibolus Gorble, K.C.B., of the Office of Woods and Forests, personally reprimanded the lady, as well as a number of fauns, shepherds, satyrs, and other natives.

THE JUDGE: When last seen, I believe, Sir Amphibolus was in an intoxicated condition in the forest, wearing a garland of vine-leaves and two white spats, riding a black goat and waving a gold-mounted umbrella?

MR. MINOS: That is so, my Lord.

THE JUDGE: A permanent official may unbend without loss of dignity.

WITNESS: I may say, my Lord, that while I am in sympathy, officially speaking, with the traditions of a subject race, I must protest against being constantly slapped by dryads in the execution of my duty. No doubt a spirit of reasoned compromise——

THE JUDGE: Certainly. They shall be instructed to stroke you only in future.

The defendants were each fined five *drachmae*, with costs on Scale A, on their undertaking not to molest or interfere with Mr. Smith in future. Unfortunately as Mr. Smith and his friends left the Court they were immediately changed into a herd of piebald truffle-hounds ; a proceeding which led to the receipt of several firm Notes, and finally (as you know) to the appointment of Lord Henry Pump as British High Commissioner and the abdication of Queen Venus. But that was a very long time ago.

XXII

THEIR MASTER'S VOICE

TOWARDS the end of a summer afternoon in the year 1800 a horse-faced gentleman wearing a high white stock and a coat with a rolling collar might have been seen ambling along a by-road near Grasmere, in the Lake District. As he goes along his eye, perpetually caught by some common object of the countryside, brightens and glows ; and ever and anon he takes a little note-book from his pocket and jots down some thought inspired by it. These he will later work into poems, some long and some short, some rhymed and some unrhymed. Were we to peep over the shoulder of Mr. William Wordsworth (for it is that eminent poet) as he scribbles we should probably see disjointed entries like this :

DAISY : Little white flower. Closes at night, open in morning. (Query, rhyme with "uneasy" ?) Grows under hedge. (Meek, modest, retiring, etc.) Also in open fields. (Ignore this.) Do worms eat daisies ? Must ask Coleridge. In meantime, what is lesson ? Good for 3 poems.

STREAM: Rushing. Never runs uphill.
(Compare Life, etc.)

DOG: Characteristic, fidelity. Wags tail, etc. Make long poem about dog staying by man fallen off rock, found by shepherd. (Query, bites shepherd? Ignore this.)

AGED MAN: Whiskers, watery eye. (Query, influenza?) Chopping sticks. Grunted when offered help. (Query, suspicious or grateful? Prob. grateful.) Ankles very swollen. Long history of aunt with swollen legs. (Ignore this.) Work up into long moral poem on Gratitude, ignoring family medical history. (Query, might use incident of great-uncle cured of boils through act of neighbour recommending Poffle's Pills—kindness, altruism, charity, fortitude, etc.? Ask Lamb and Southey abt. this.)

Mem: Good first line for poem on beauties of Nature:

"How green, how green the grass! How blue the azure sky!"

And so on; for the trivial round, the common task ever furnished Mr. Wordsworth, so to speak, with all he might need to ask. In this he is (as in some other things) the greatest of English poets who make their living out of Nature.

To-day the countryside is full of little poets—by Our Lady of Rocamadour! they swarm and wriggle so thick that a man can hardly stop scraping them off his boots—registering the reactions of their little souls to the winds, the trees, the clouds, and what you will. *Not one of them (and I know them all) could get a moral lesson out of an old man with a gumboil.* Is it any surprise that I have to-day made up my mind to bring about, if possible, a revival of enthusiasm for the Master-Poet, and have already arranged to have “We Are Seven” recited in a certain Chelsea studio by a lank, glassy-eyed female in a green jumper, to the accompaniment of two oboes and a Cingalese bonglehorn? It will give them a new sensation, for they think the S*****s to be the last thing in pure poetry. Heaven forgive us all.

It so happened that I was declaiming this very poem of the Master’s to a superior little poet the other day as we were walking across the windswept hills. I felt the beauty of the thing very deeply, and I flatter myself that Henry Ainley could not have put into it more fire, more sonorous music, more ecstasy—more *devil*, as one might say; and when I came to the line

“My stockings there I often knit,”

my voice rose to a bellow that shook the very

hills. To my anger this mincing little Georgian poet remained unmoved. I therefore searched my mind for a space and said to him abruptly :

“ Do you known ‘ Edwin and Willie ; or The Verger’s Secret ’ ? ”

He did not.

“ It is one of the finest things,” I said, “ in the Master’s later manner. Allow me to recite you a few lines.”

I then began at once in an exalted voice :

“ Ay, ay, Sir,” said the good old Man, while tears
Cours’d freely down his flowing silver beard,
“ In that same Tomb there lies old William too,
The Uncle of the boys, who died of grief
And also of cirrhosis of the liver ;
His wife is buried under yonder birch,
A bitter life she had of it, I fear !
For both her sons went wrong—one went to sea,
And one became an actor ; and for years
She suffer’d from a hacking cough and sharp
Pains after eating, not to speak of warts.
Her sister married George, the waggoner,
She was anæmic, but a good plain cook,
Although her legs were bowed. George had two sons.
Frederick and Ernest, both fine healthy lads,
Tho’ Ernest fell down Farmer Mangle’s well
One night, and badly rasped his nose, and then
Left home and went to London, where he wed
The eldest daughter of a Mrs. Gumm,
Whose husband, formerly a plumber’s mate,
Had then been dead four years, or maybe five.
His tomb’s at Kensal Green.”

The old Man wip’d

His eyes, and then began again to speak

Of William—not the one who married Jane,
But Edwin's Uncle, Nosey William Jubb,
Who brought up both the boys. Edwin, though frail,
Was tallish for his age, but Willie had
His tonsils out before the age of five,
And when his brother went away he droop'd
And lost his sleep, and grew so pale and thin
No doctor seemed to do him good. At length
Old Mrs. Buffle—not the sexton's wife,
Who married a policeman afterwards.
But old Kate Buffle, Bertram Buffle's wife,
The aged gardener at the Rectory—
Said, "Why not give him Gargle's Globulene?
It cured my married daughter, Mrs. Pomsett—
The one who lives in Dalston, not the one
Whose husband, Percy Punt, fell off a roof,
Though happily insured—of lassitude,
And dizziness, and——"

At this point my friend had the misfortune to fall into a dewpond—one of the famous Sussex dewponds which stud the Downs (and the literature about them) like jewels and are so ancient that no one knows who made them. This dewpond, however, had sloping concrete sides and was made by a contractor in Birmingham, and the rains had made it slippery. I have rarely seen a more disgusting and ridiculous spectacle than that of a Georgian poet falling suddenly into one of these ponds and floundering in the weeds.

"How do you like Wordsworth?" I inquired eagerly as he slopped his way out.

His reply was of such a nature, I regret to

say, that even Mr. Masfield's publishers would have blenched at it. But to invigorate and cheer him as we hurried home I recited a large part of "The Excursion," which you must read for yourselves one of these days when you have the strength.

XXIII

SIR ALASTAIR'S BRIDE ; OR, THE REWARD OF RESPECTFULNESS

*(Another Moral Agricultural Story, showing that we should
Revere our Betters.)*

THE Stranger passing through the Village of M——, in L——shire, on a certain Morning in June could not have Failed to Perceive on every Hand a Cheerful Bustle of Animation which Betokened some Occasion of Rejoicing. Aged Men in snow-white Smocks and Neatly Trimmed Whiskers hobbled Hither and Thither, ejaculating with Great Fervour, “The new Squire is Expected to Arrive ere Noon” ; and Some were Not Slow to add in Deep, Respectful Tones, “God Bless Him.”

On the Village Green the Female Inhabitants, dressed in their Sunday Clothes, Whiled away the Time in Curtseying Low ; and beside them the Young Men of the Village, their Eyes Beaming with a Desire to Perfect themselves in Reverent Loyalty to the New Squire, Repeatedly Touched their Forelocks in Anticipation of his Arrival, taking their Time from the Right.

Such was the Scene ; a Familiar One in our English Countryside, Pleasing alike in its Innocence and its Unanimity. The Old Squire of M——, Sir William Weeble, had been Dead Six Months, after a Long Life in which Benevolence and Condescension were Equally Mingled, and which had been Characterised by a Placidity only Interrupted, Towards the Close, by Vexatious Attacks not only from Snakes both Pink and Green, but also from Parti-coloured Ptarmigans Performing on the Bassoon ; an Infliction which the Aged Baronet Bore with Piety and True Resignation.

The New Squire, Alastair Donald McClachan, Esq., was a Stranger to the Neighbourhood. Hence it is Not to be Wondered At that a Flush of Eager but Respectful Anticipation dwelt on Every Cheek in the Village and Added a Deeper Note of Sincerity to the Petitions for his Health and Prosperity which (under the Direction of the Rector, the Reverend Jas. Toombs) Arose on Every Hand in Tremulous, though Confident, Voices.

Among the Rural Crowd drawn up on the green None was More Conspicuous, both for Beauty and Virtue, than Susan Higgs, the Miller's Daughter. Though for her Sake no Fewer than Six Rustic Lovers had Desperately Taken their Leave of Life—two by the Bullet, two by the Mill Dam, and two by Choking

Themselves with her Father's Dough—Susan was Among the First to Condemn their Rash Act, which Might in a Less Well-Conducted young Female, indeed, have Instilled into her Mind a Satisfaction Unsuitable to her Station in Life.

At Last a Cloud of Dust announced the Arrival of the Handsome Equipage in which sat Mr. Alastair McClachan, the New Squire, his Lady, and the Agent, a Mr. McTavish. Every Knee was Bent, every Voice Upraised in Respectful Welcome, every Forelock Pulled as the Carriage Drove Rapidly Past, Here and There Crushing (but not Fatally) some Aged Inhabitant who had Not Been Able to get Out of the Way.

As the Squire, a Handsome, Dark, Aquiline, and Imperious Figure, Glanced Swiftly over the Assembled Villagers Susan Higgs stepped forward with the Bouquet which it was Her Privilege to Present; but in the Confusion of the Moment (for her Aged Aunt, a Mrs. Gobb, had Just Been Run Over) she could do Little More than Curtsey and Blush. His Agent at once Apprised Mr. Alastair McClachan of the Circumstance; at Which the Squire, Observing Haughtily, "Vell, and Vy Not? The Old Voman vas not Bassed Away, isn't it?" Ordered the Coachman to Drive On.

At that Moment, to the Horror and Surprise

of All, a Husky Voice was Heard to Pronounce the word "*Shame!*" A Movement of Repulsion Passed Through the Ranks of the Villagers; there was Not One who did not Shudder and Recoil from the Rash Unknown. The Reverend Jas. Toombs, indeed, was the First to Recover, and in a Deep Voice Quivering with Emotion and Just Anger called upon the Utterer of that Word to Stand Forth, if he Dared Face the Consequence of his Impiety and Disrespect.

Amid the Hisses and Execrations of the Whole Village a Bent, Grey-Haired Figure shuffled into the Light. It was William Higgs, the Miller, a Cousin by Marriage, once Removed, of the Aged Female who had, by Falling under the Squire's Carriage Wheels, Brought such Ruin and Degradation on her Family.

"Father!" cried Susan Higgs, advancing. "Nay!" continued the Girl, her Bosom Heaving Rapidly, her Eyes Flashing with Anger and Contempt, her Hands Tightly Clenched. "Nay, call me No Longer Daughter! Wretched Man, thus to Presume to Address a Gentleman of the Condescension, the Fortune, and the True Benevolence of Him who Sits in Yonder Magnificent Equipage! Retire at Once to Await the Punishment of a Just Resentment, and Strive, by Sincere Penitence, to Undo the Wrong, if it be Not Too Late!"

So saying Susan Higgs Joined with the Rest of the Villagers in Stoning the unhappy Man Back to his Mill; from Which, by Failing to Repay, with Interest, sums Ranging from £1 to £500 Lent him by the Squire on his Note of Hand Alone, he was Shortly Evicted and Reduced to Beggary and Ruin, and is Now, I believe, in an Institution for the Totally Destitute of the Lower Classes.

Shortly after he had been Driven Out by a Justly Indignant Populace Susan Higgs became LADY McCLACHAN, the Squire's Lady Passing Away very Suddenly and a Well-Deserved Baronetcy arriving a Week Later; in which the Villagers of M—— Never Ceased (and Rightly) to Discern the Finger of Providence.

XXIV

TROUBLE WITH A LADY

A LITTLE earlier in this book, I think, I mentioned that one of my chief reasons for forsaking the Town and coming to live in the innocent rural solitude of the Sussex countryside was the state of health of my Muse, which at that time was seriously perturbing me. My Muse, a good girl but peaky, and inclined to sharpness of the nose and a tendency to whimper (though always the perfect lady, no matter how many times a week she might be called on to awake and soar, and never without her gloves), my Muse, I am thankful to say, is now much restored. Country air and good plain food (with a glass or two of Yquem when the Squire asks us to dinner) have done the girl a world of good. You should have heard what she said about Mr. What's-his-Name, the famous Nature poet, the other evening! How forcible! Yet how genteel! It is a pleasure to keep such a nice, refined, thoroughly *womanly* Muse (as the editor of *The English Gentlewoman* remarked only the other day, on seeing her "Lines to

the Duchess of —, on her Grace's Presenting an Ailing Member of the Labouring Classes with a Bound Copy of *Marvels of Pond Life*").

To some extent, no doubt, this gratifying state of affairs is due to my own careful training of my Muse. It was I who formed her character and moulded her mind. It was I who warned her against dubious associates, chose her companions for her, and saw carefully to it that she was brought up as a lady. I remember well the distressing day she came to me and said (with a rather vulgar wink) that she wanted to blow a tin trumpet and go dancing with soldiers on Hampstead Heath.

I said harshly, "You have been associating with that Muse of Mr. R-dy-rd K-pl-ng's! Be careful!"

I regret to say that her reply was "'Strewth and gorblimey! Why the'll not?" My only course was instantly to take strict measures and put her under lock and key. I let her out at intervals, however, to play with refined and harmless companions like the Muse of Mr. Dr-nkw-t-r, the Muse of Mr. W-rdsw-rth, the Muse of Mr. L-ngf-ll-w, and the Muses of the more gentlemanly Georgian poets who attach themselves to Nature, such as Mr. Bl-nd-n.

She said to me one day, "May I mix with the Muse of Mr. H-l-re B-ll-c?"

I said, after some thought, "Yes. She is a

lovely creature, with an exquisite voice, and I admire her more than any other contemporary Muse. But if she asks you to have a pint of beer you are to refuse, for you are not strong enough. You may, however, join her in songs in praise of Sussex, or the Faith, but not in songs against the Rich, for that will ruin you socially and you will never get into the Upper Circles."

With that I let her go, and I thought the girl seemed happy enough—at one moment tending an aged and asthmatic pet sheep (for she has a kind heart) and at another committing to memory some verse of Mr. L-ngf-ll-w or Mr. Dr-nkw-t-r; now taking her little porringer of bread and milk and eating her modest supper under a tree, now devouring "The Idiot Boy" or a little poem about grass by Mr. D-v-s. But how easily is a trusting heart deceived! It was only a week later that I came in from a walk with my dog and, calling on my Muse to wake and aspire, desired her to recite to me some little pastoral thing of her own composition.

"Just a little what-d'you-call-it," I said to her. "Something expressive of joy, of innocence, of the amiable nature of the lives led by persons connected with the agricultural industry, which you have now had sufficient opportunity of observing."

My Muse, coughing slightly, began at once to recite the following—

PASTORAL

“ The lumpish trollop !
 Let 'er bleed ;
 I'll gie 'er a wallop,”
 Said Farmer Seed.

The black old man
 As he went past
 Knifed his girl Nan,
 Muttering “ Blast ! ”

From the chimney corner
 Ironing clothes
 Old Grandma Horner
 Spat out oaths.

“ D——n you, Pa ! ”
 Roared Seed's sòn Fred ;
 Caught up a crowbar,
 Stunned him dead.

“ Ha' done, you swine ! ”
 “ You gorbling trull ! ”
 “ Gorm you, it's mine ! ”
 “ By Zookers, you shull ! ”

Old Uncle Twitchen
 Choked and blue ;
 Ned in the kitchen
 Strangling Sue.

They hanged Seed soon
 In Gloucester Jail ;
 In the full moon
 From a nail.

George and Fred
Killed each other
All are dead
Save their mother.

From Starvegoose Farm
She wandered raving,
Biting her arm
And gnawing the paving.

In Bristol Moll——

“One moment,” I said with icy politeness. “No doubt you have some explanation to offer for this?”

“Not at all,” said my Muse defiantly. “It is a perfectly good poem dealing with a commonplace of English country life, acknowledged as such by the best modern authorities.”

With great deliberation I wiped and put on an enormous pair of horn-rimmed spectacles which I keep to intimidate and abash my Muse with.

“As to the apportionment of blame,” I said in even, judicial tones, “that is a question which we will examine at leisure. In the meantime, I think, you will hardly have the effrontery to deny that you have been surreptitiously mixing with undesirable persons. Come,” I said in a sudden, sharp voice, “*when did you last hold any intercourse with the Muse of Mr. M-s-f-ld?*”

My Muse hung her head and began to whimper.

“ You will retire to your chamber at once,” I said sternly, “ and remain there for such period as I shall deem fit. During that time you will occupy yourself in committing to memory Alfr-d L-rd T-nnys-n’s Ode on the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Newdigate Prize Poem for the last three years, the Hawthornden Prize Poems since the institution of that award, the Collected Poems (excluding “ Poems of Passion ”) of Mrs. Ella Wh-l-r W-lc-x, *Oliver Cromwell*, a poetic drama recently staged (with all the hymns and Blue-book extracts), Mr. N——”

But my Muse had swooned dead away, and I had to get oxygen to the girl.

XXV

A SLICE OF HIGH-LIFE; OR, BLOOD WILL TELL

Written at the request of Mr. Otis P. Boomer, who had ordered a little sketch of Real Everyday English Country-House Life, to be played in his Private Theatre in the Boomer Mansion on Fifth Avenue, New York.

BLOOD WILL TELL

THE DUKE OF BAYSWATER	LADY PAMELA BAYSWATER
LORD HENRY BILGE	HONORIA LADY BILGE
SIR CEDRIC WOZZLE	THE HON MRS. VAMPLEY
Butlers, Footmen, Dogboys, Falconers, etc.	

Morning. The hall at Bayswater Towers.

This sumptuous apartment is decorated in regal taste. Two tall windows of richly coloured glass shed a dazzling light on the ancestral portraits, the suits of armour, the tapestries, the carved oak, and the heraldic shields which cover the walls. Even the rails surrounding the swimming pool in the centre are of silver-gilt.

The DUKE OF BAYSWATER, dressed for hunting, is sitting at the long oak table examining a rifle. Beyond a pair of gold spurs and a tall hat bearing the family crest he bears no indication of his exalted rank.

As he looks down the barrel LADY PAMELA, *his only daughter, trips down the great staircase. She wears a simple negligée and a small coronet set with pearls, and her manner is haughty.*

LADY PAMELA: Good mornin', papa. Goin' shootin'?

THE DUKE: Yes, Pamela. Stags.

LADY PAMELA: Do take care of yourself, papa.

THE DUKE (*rising*). Pamela! The Bayswaters do not take care of themselves! (*Proudly.*) I trust I am worthy of the blood which flows in my veins—that blood which nerved Rollo de Bayswater, our Norman sire, to die for Charles at Agincourt.

As the DUKE, drawing himself up, points to the picture of Rollo, LADY PAMELA curtsies deeply, murmuring the family motto.

THE DUKE: But come, my child. Where is Lord Henry Bilge, the scion of a family as proud, and nearly as old, as our own?

LADY PAMELA: He is not down yet, I think.

THE DUKE (*shaking his head*): Effete, I fear.

LADY PAMELA: No, papa. He is robin'. Recollect that to-day he pays a visit to the Tower of London, where his uncle is imprisoned for life for treason.

THE DUKE (*thoughtfully*): Yes, yes. I remember. Dear, dear. Poor Adalbert!

Enter SIR CEDRIC WOZZLE, a tall gentleman whose severe and formal Court dress is mitigated by a light grey tweed cap.

SIR CEDRIC: Good morning, Duke.

THE DUKE (*presenting Lady Pamela*): Meet my daughter. Pamela, Sir Cedric Wozzle is President of Heralds' College.

SIR CEDRIC (*bowing*): Pleased to have the honour of your acquaintance.

LADY PAMELA (*coldly*): Don't mention it.

SIR CEDRIC: Duke, I think we can fix this business.

LADY PAMELA (*yawning*): Will papa be an Earl then? Oh, how borin'.

A tall footman, in plum-coloured plush and gold lace, enters and prostrates himself, afterwards handing the DUKE a note on a silver salver.

THE DUKE (*starting*): What's this? (*Reads.*)

"HON. MRS. VAMPLEY,—Your letter of the 8th to hand, have the honor to inform you that owing to your behavior shall never see you again, request the favor of return of receipt, have resolved to never forge again.—LORD HENRY BILGE."

(*Thunderstruck.*) Lord Henry Bilge?

As they all stand aghast the HON. MRS. VAMPLEY sweeps in. She has green eyes and bronze hair, and wears a clinging green gown with no back to it. A slim diamond tiara completes her morning dress.

THE DUKE : Hon. Mrs. Vampley ! You see this ?

MRS. VAMP. (*with a low, musical laugh*) : Yes, Duke.

She passes out, laughing musically.

LADY PAMELA : That woman !

SIR CEDRIC : She is well-born, but she poisons her husbands. Some people will not invite her.

THE DUKE (*angrily*) : She goes home with her box to-night. (*Bitterly.*) And to think that a Bilge, about to ally himself with a Bayswater, should be found——! Sir Cedric Woozle !

SIR CEDRIC : Yes, your Lordship ?

THE DUKE : I call on you, as President of Heralds' College, to formally deprive Lord Henry Bilge of a title he has proved himself unworthy to bear.

SIR CEDRIC (*hesitating*) : Your Lord——

THE DUKE (*imperiously*) : Not a word !

He rings, and three footmen appear and genuflect thrice.

My golden hammer. Quickly.

The footmen go out, and return with the hammer.

THE DUKE : Summon Lord Henry Bilge.

They stand in silence, waiting for LORD HENRY. The DUKE is pointing to his family crest. LADY PAMELA, pale and haughty, is repeating the family motto to herself. SIR CEDRIC removes his tweed cap and assumes a full suit of plate-armour from a stand near by.

Enter LORD HENRY BILGE, in his robes of ermine and velvet, with train. He wears gold spurs and a hat with plumes. At the sight of the letter on the ground he starts violently.

THE DUKE (*hoarsely*) : Lord Henry Bilge !
You—— (*to SIR CEDRIC*) : Proceed !

SIR CEDRIC (*to LORD HENRY*) : Kindly step forward a little. Thank you.

Takes the hammer and formally knocks off LORD HENRY's gold spurs.

Enter HONORIA LADY BILGE.

HON. LADY B. : Henry ! My son ! Why, what has happened ?

THE DUKE (*sternly*) : Your son, Honoria Lady Bilge, is no longer a member of the

British Aristocracy ; he has openly disgraced his blood and the proud names of Bilge and Bayswater.

LORD HENRY (*hoarsely*) : Mother !

HON. LADY B. (*lifting her lorgnette*) : Really, Henry !

She lowers her glasses and moves away.

THE DUKE (*significantly*) : Only one course lies open to you now.

LORD HENRY, *clenching his teeth, goes to a drawer, takes out a little mother-of-pearl revolver, and goes into the library.*

SIR CEDRIC (*to HON. LADY B.*) : Lovely morning.

HON. LADY B. : Yes. Are you going trout-sticking to-day ?

A dull bang is heard from the library.

With the characteristic morgue of the British Aristocracy everyone ignores it. LADY PAMELA is turning over the pictures in a magazine. The DUKE is examining his gun. SIR CEDRIC is showing HONORIA LADY BILGE the family portrait-album.

SIR CEDRIC : That is the *eighth* Duke. The one with the goat. His Grace is the one wearing a hat.

HON. LADY B. (*drawling*) : You don't say.

The DUKE OF BAYSWATER, laying down his gun, draws himself up and comes down the hall.

THE DUKE (*drawing a breath*) : Effete we may be—ay, and worse. But damme, Blood Will Tell. (*Cordially, to HONORIA LADY B.*) : A game of billiards ?

They all go out, chatting.

THE END

XXVI

THE GREAT WHITE LIGHT

A GREAT wind from the sea is shouting over the Downs, driving the little clouds like little boats across the blue. The lush meadows are knee-deep in buttercups, marshmallows—or is that not a kind of sweet? Possibly I am thinking of vegetable marrows—loosestrife, periwinkle, Old Dog's Nose, bungweed, and scores of other country flowers whose names I do not know and cannot be bothered (unlike so many Georgian poets) to invent. A group of cows, one of whom so closely resembles in feature and expression a Member of Parliament of my acquaintance that I find myself instinctively raising my hat as I pass, lies munching in the sun. On the duckpond four ducks, with their expression of sincere but slightly boneheaded rectitude, are cruising aimlessly in the bright green scum. There is a pleasant hum of bees in the air, steadily gathering honey for my tea. On the upland slope a ploughman urges his team with rural oaths.

All Nature, one might say, is one vast placid

smile. It is difficult for me to contemplate the scene and realise that I have at last taken a step which is so momentous, so far-reaching in its infinite reactions, that I can hardly yet believe that the struggle is over and the Rubicon crossed.

Many other thinkers besides myself have retired into the bosom of Nature to commune with their own spirits or to make some tremendous resolution. Some (like Wordsworth) have devoted themselves to the production of improving verse about flowers, birds, clouds, idiot boys, aged men, and other rural sights. Some (like Thoreau. My hat ! What a bore ! What a bore !) have become philosophers. Some, in a frenzy of inspiration, have meditated amendments to the Factory Acts. Some have written exquisite lyrics, entrancing essays, tremendous epics. Some have tremblingly consecrated their lives to the composition of advertisements for tinned salmon and water-tube boilers. Some have made a compact with their soul to float a rubber company, edit a Life of Cobden, patent an improved hatguard, hang themselves for love, read the poetry of Mr. —, and breed prize hens. Such crises, such upheavals of the soul, are best faced out in silence and solitude, and, indeed, are in the best kind of men inspired only by Nature.

For myself, though I had long meditated the

step, it was only yesterday, at three o'clock in the afternoon, that I finally decided to become a Bimetallist. It was, indeed, no sudden step. There are old families which may be said to have Bimetallism in their very blood; and though no ancestor of mine actually laid down his life for his adherence to the Quantitative Theory of money, it is rather a boast with us that whereas other people keep bowls of goldfish exclusively, we have from time immemorial mixed ours with silverfish. One of my earliest recollections, too, is that of visiting a gracious old lady of Bimetallist traditions and observing in a glass case the pen with which one of her kinsmen wrote to the *Statist* in 1889 pointing out that during the five years ended with 1880 the exports of gold from America exceeded the imports by less than $17\frac{1}{2}$ million dollars, or about $3\frac{1}{2}$ million sterling. For this he had to fly the country. I shall never forget the tear in the old lady's eye and the proud tremor in her voice as she recited the story. "Wha' fears to speak o' '89?" she said with her head held high; a difficult thing to say correctly with the head in any position. Nourished, therefore, in an atmosphere of Bimetallism, as other children are in Royalism, Jacobitism, and Vegetarianism, I grew up sympathetically inclined. And now that the final step has been taken I am ready to meet what

may befall me with a high heart and a cool head.

It will be no easy task. Bimetallists, I think, are generally ostracised by Society and the mob alike. Henceforth very often a beautiful young girl, observing me in some drawing-room, will say, "Mother, who is that fine-looking, rather sad man over there? By his lofty brow and his pale but distinguished features he must be some great thinker. Is it Mr. Wells, Mother? I should like to meet him." And her mother, hastily catching the girl to her side, will say hurriedly, "Hush, dear. That is a Bimetallist. They are said to devour children whole," and will take the girl away at once.

Good women are said to avert their eyes and draw back their skirts on passing a Bimetallist. Dogs bite Bimetallists even more freely than members of the Decimal Association. In some countries a Bimetallist cannot be a feoffee, nor be seised in double burgage, nor enjoy and have to his use any freehold, messuage, easement, heriot, or other benefit (such, e.g., as an elephant, or a wool mat) whatsoever. In Denmark any free man perceiving a Bimetallist on his land may secure and bind him, and after boring him through both ears set him to draw the plough. In South Slavia and in some parts of Transylvania Bimetallists are forced

to travel on all fours and may be hunted at any time of the year. In England they are rarely allowed to attain any rank higher than that of baronet. In Portugal they are often chained through the nose and forced to perform in the street. What is there, then, in the nature of Bimetallism which sustains and nerves its followers to withstand the almost universal vituperation, hatred, and violence with which they are surrounded everywhere ?

In order to answer this question we must first ask ourselves, "What is Bimetallism, and what does it stand for?" The answer is simple. Bimetallism, in a word, means——

Bimetallism stands for——

The simple significance of Bimetall——

It is perfectly obvious that Bim——

I beg your pardon. What Bimetallism really amounts to is this, that the Treasury——

Perhaps it will be easier for you if I begin by saying that if the reserve of gold is, roughly, $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the call-over, and a carry over of 16 millions in legal tender, how does France ? And, given a bullion value of 200 millions, should Greece or (conversely) Spain ? But, on the other hand, is (or are) the United States to follow the same example ? Surely not ! For in that case where would Portugal step in ? Whereas Turkey (as is obvious from what I have just written) could have no possible

interest in doing so, and indeed would reject such a hypothesis as economically untenable and sociologically unsound, particularly as Germany's reserve, *pro tanto*, would have fallen.

But mere words, after all, can hardly express a state of ecstasy, a settled and assured conviction, a high and secure exaltation of mind and spirit. It is sufficient to say that for Bimetallism I am prepared to——

Excuse me one moment. I find there is a small correction to make. It appears from Appendix D in Lloyd on Bimetallism (which I was reading when the great white light broke in on me, and which I have just picked up in order to refresh myself anew) that Bimetallism is all wrong and that the whole book is in fact an argument against it. Will you therefore, please, go carefully through this and substitute the word "Monometallism" for "Bimetallism" wherever it occurs? Thank you. Thank you very much. That will be all.

XXVII

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

NOBODY with an ear for music could have failed to be aware of the grunts of rage issuing from archæologists all over the country when a Mr. Jowett, First Commissioner of Works, was reported to have given a sect known as the Druids permission to bury the ashes of one of their number within the precincts of Stonehenge, which they believe to be Druidical remains; a theory furiously denied, I believe, by many scholars. At the thought of handing over a national monument for such purposes archæologists are up on their hind legs at once; and (like very aged sheep) they are terrible in their anger and greatly to be feared. I once knew a fierce and hairy geologist who beat his uncle to death with his little hammer for confusing Oolitic strata with Old Red Sandstone. He is honoured by the Geological Society to this day.

As to the question whether national monuments like Stonehenge should be used for private burials or not, I do not propose to discuss it here. It is not new, I think. There may be some living now who recollect the pother that was made a generation or two ago

over the Brothers of Baal. You have never heard of the Brothers of Baal? The name of Arthur Bupp-Stiffings, perhaps, conveys nothing to you? You are not stirred at the name of Mrs. Pommerton? Is it possible? Is it possible? I had better recite the whole story as briefly as I can.

The Brothers of Baal were a compact body—they came too late to be included in Voltaire's survey of the sects of England—who worshipped the sun and had their headquarters at Balham. They had a special devotion to the Albert Memorial, and it was their custom to meet there twice a month to gash themselves with knives, afterwards returning home by a No. 29 'bus. They sprang suddenly into prominence towards the evening of the Victorian era, when their Grand Bishbosh, a Mr. Arthur Bupp-Stiffings, declared his intention of sacrificing his aunt, Mrs. Pommerton, on the steps of the Memorial at the first full moon of May; and although I do not think there is any reference to the affair in Greville's Memoirs (Mrs. Rowbotham's Edition), there is plenty of contemporary evidence that it developed into a sensation of the first class.

The first protest against the proposed action of the Brothers of Baal came very quickly from the Kensington Gore branch of the Society of Archæologists, who declared that the Albert

Memorial, like the Crystal Palace and the statue of Mr. Cobden at Camden Town, was a national monument, though it had not yet been mentioned in a poem by Mr. Tennyson. A fiery rejoinder came immediately from the Grand Bishbosh, declaring that the Brothers of Baal believed the Albert Memorial to be Chaldean in origin and had direct evidence that the Supreme Sokk had been buried alive under it in the year 5643 B.C.

The next event was a significant letter from the Prime Minister to a correspondent, containing the passage :

“The Prime Minister is in close touch with the situation, and will deliver a speech when the occasion arises. He trusts that in these anxious times all Liberals will rally round the Party and remember what Sir Robert Peel said in 1846.”

On the same day Professor Sir Wulfric Stodge, P.R.S., wrote to *The Sarcophagus* denying the statement that the Albert Memorial was Chaldean in origin. “On the contrary,” he declared, “its architecture and decoration are distinctively Græco-Gothic. I do not believe that its inauguration was attended by human sacrifice.”

The Grand Bishbosh of Baal replied affirming his belief, and declaring that his aunt was already fattening voluntarily for the ceremony

—“a fact,” he added, “which sufficiently proves her firm adherence to the precepts of the High Wop of Uk, who is buried under the third step of the Memorial, counting from the top, and we have secret hieroglyphics in our possession to prove it, not to speak of a passage in the Inmost Corridor of the Black Book of Bilj.” This statement was brilliantly refuted the following week by Professor Poffle, who wrote to *The Mausoleum* quoting Strumpff (*Aus der Albertischesmemorialwerke Einzweidrei-Vierfünfsechs*, VI, 354–379 ; VII, 78, sec. iii (a)) to the effect that the Phœnicians devoured their young but threw all their politicians to the dogs ; a manifesto which was quoted at a special meeting of the Archæological Society and loudly cheered by 125 solemn men in tall hats and whiskers. The same afternoon Mr. Justice Guffaugh inquired in the King’s Bench, “Who is Albert Manorial ?”

By this time the Brothers of Baal were split into three fiercely warring parties—High, Broad, and Low—and the entire nation was roused to a feverish pitch of excitement. Petitions and counter-petitions poured into Parliament. Experts wrote constantly in the monthly reviews proving the Albert Memorial to be Neolithic, Mozarabic, Rococo Palladian, Byzantine, Fantee, Aztec, and Hindu Gothic ; also Baroque-Flamboyant, Early Eskimo, and

Perso-Assyrian. A leading article in *The Time-piece* descended slowly and heavily upon all parties, crushing the life out of everything within reach. At Marlborough Street a poet named Henry Bawl was fined 5s. for compelling an old lady, by means of threats and personal violence, to admire the Memorial publicly. Meanwhile the Government kept silence; partly because the Prime Minister feared a public outbreak and partly because nobody in the Government knew what it was all about. Several important minutes were circulated inter-departmentally, however.

It was about this time that a young publicist named Shaw wrote a pamphlet proving everybody else in England to be a fool.

At length the day of the ceremony arrived. The Grand Bishbosh of Baal drove his aunt up to Kensington Gardens in a hansom. The other Brothers of Baal, bringing their sacrificial knives and some warm milk and sandwiches, came from Balham on a 29 'bus. They found the neighbourhood of the Albert Memorial black with masses of eager spectators, held back from the sacrificial area by reinforcements of police. The Mayor of Kensington was present with his moustache Rover, which was universally admired.

A special squad of mounted police escorted the Grand Bishbosh as, amid a tense silence,

he slowly pushed his aged aunt up the steps ; and as he raised himself from his triple prostration in front of the Memorial a uniformed official of the Gas Light and Coke Company stepped forward and gave him in charge for stealing and receiving certain moneys, the property of the company, to wit four shillings and fourpence halfpenny.* The crowd then dispersed, and the Brothers of Baal went home on a 29 'bus to Balham, where they dissolved and were heard of no more. But the archæologists of England rejoiced greatly, in articles of enormous length and incalculable boredom ; and a rising young poet, then on leave from India, summed up his impressions of the day in a poem which began :

Ye ha' kept the tryst of our trysting, ye ha' sworn the oath
we sware ;

Was it nothing to ye, the Thing we thought and the Burden
that we bare ?

Look East to the jaws of Googli, and West to the Hills of
Hrat :

Was it this that we greatly fashioned, or those or these or
that ?

Hear ye the Law and the Boasting !

From Chirk to Chingalong,

Ye are my Ultimate People ;

Seek ye the Right of the Wrong !

But as nobody could make head or tail of it
no great harm was done.

* He passed away on February 18, 1905, aged eighty-nine,
and is buried at Kensal Green.

XXVIII

“MR. SHAKESPEARE PRESENTS . . .”

NOTE.—*Shakespearean scholars are now aware, thanks to the researches of Professor Dogbody (who now occupies the William B. Shakespeare Chair of Drama at the Homer P. Goop University of Gooptown, Pa.), that in the year 1614 the Master emerged from his retirement to direct a Charity Matinée at the Fortune Theatre in aid of the Royal Torturers' and Rack Mechanics' Benevolent Fund.*

At this special performance women's parts were played by actresses (some titled) and special scenery was designed. The following authentic sketch of a rehearsal of a revival of "The Tempest" is taken, by permission, from a lecture delivered by the Professor last month. The language has been modernised.

ON this afternoon in February 1614, the sombre half-lit stage of the Fortune Theatre presents a scene of unremitting, but not chaotic, industry. The hour of rehearsal was 11.30, and since 12.45 (the time is now 5.30) work has gone on without a break, amid the rumble of scene-shifting and the hum of conversation among the actors and actresses grouped at the back of the stage. Occasionally during a lull in the stage business actors' voices rise above the general buzz. . . .

"So I said to Burbage, 'Not on your life!' I said, 'Fifty a week, that's my figure.' That put him in his place all right, and I simply walked out."

"Absolutely tore the house up, dear boy! They rose at me."

"I had to refuse. I said, 'What will the public think if Henry Winsome plays a part that isn't a Henry Winsome part?' He said, 'Dear boy, *you* can play anything—absolutely anything.' I said, 'Yes, I know that, but I've got to think of the public.'"

"Yes, dear boy. I saw your show. You were wonderful—wonderful. Did you see my Second Gravedigger at the Globe? I practically remodelled it. Made it an individual part, in fact. Womming was livid with jealousy."

The producer, the famous actor-manager Burbage, raps peremptorily on the stage with his stick. The murmur of conversation dies down. "Masque," says Mr. Burbage briefly. "From Ceres' entrance. Begin."

Rosamund Jasmyn, a new discovery and a prize product of the Fortune Dramatic Academy, trips on and begins:

"Heel, many-calah'd messenjah, that ne'ah
Dast disobee the wafe av Jupitah;
Who weeth thay saffron weengs, upon may flahs,
Diffusest hany-drops, refreshing shahs——"

A muffled roar comes from the dim recesses of the house. It is the author, the great Mr. Shakespeare, a handsome, white-bearded old gentleman, boiling with fury.

"*Does this young lady,*" he booms, "*imagine she is having tea at the Rectory?*"

"Who did the lyrics for this show?" says a tall young man in a crimson doublet lounging in the pit to a stoutish young man in a shabby black cloak.

"The old man," answers his friend, yawning. He nods towards Mr. Shakespeare, still raptly engaged with Miss Jasmyn.

"Good God!" says the tall young man, and lapses into moody silence.

"Begin again," barks Mr. Burbage.

Miss Jasmyn tosses her head and begins again. Mr. Shakespeare and the producer bury their heads in their hands and moan quietly. Ceres finishes her speech and makes way for Iris, played by Lady Hermione Sussex, a Society recruit (with considerable financial backing) to the stage. Lady Hermione swims on and begins:

"A contract of true love to celebrate——"

A yelp of pain from the author.

"Thank you, Lady Hermione," says the producer, forcing a dry smile, when the final wail is over. "That is excellent." The scene

proceeds. Prospero begins his speech to Ferdinand :

"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces——"

"My dear!" says Miss June Dawn to Miss April Eglantine, "*Did* you ever see anything like the Jasmyn?"

"Too dire," says Miss Eglantine, glancing in her mirror.

The little group of actresses bursts into vivacious congratulation as Miss Jasmyn approaches.

"My dear! Lovely!"

"Too sweet!"

"Wonderful!"

Miss Jasmyn smiles faintly and moves away. Her friends resume.

"Well, if I had feet like that——"

"When I was playing Juliet at the Globe that special week last season," says Miss Dawn confidentially, "she was playing a small *ingénue* part, and one night a man sent up a note asking her to dinner. She never——"

"Silence!" roars the producer.

"——answered the note, and we found out afterwards that it was her eldest son! Isn't it *extraordinary* how some women——"

A sudden loud disturbance on the stage. The author has leaped on and is booming at

the leading man. "For the love of Heaven!" he bellows, "try and remember you aren't directing old women to the silks and laces! You're delivering an unspeakably noble and moving speech, full of solemn poetry. Listen to me:

"The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces——"

"Table here," says the producer to the stage hands. "Chairs. One light. Get that curtain up smartly on the cue, 'Ferdinand and Miranda discovered playing chess.' Where's Ferdinand?"

"Here," says the *jeune premier* languidly.

"Where's Miranda? Boy! Find Lady Angela Wessex. Give her my compliments and tell her she's on in three minutes."

Prospero continues:

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with——"

"It ain't no good, Mr. Burbage," says a loud rumbling voice. A huge and wrathful form looms suddenly in front of the unhappy Prospero. "It can't be done."

"What d'you mean, it can't be done?" snaps the producer irritably. "What can't be done?"

"This 'ere bottom o' the sea tabloo business,

end o' Scene I, like what Mr. Shakespeare says 'e wants it done," says the Master Carpenter balefully, eyeing the author. "Not on this stage it can't be done, not unless we 'ad a glarss tank. They never 'ad no call for such when they produced this 'ere play at the Globe. Any'ow," adds the Master Carpenter, "I wash my 'ands of it, and that's that."

Mr. Burbage flings his arms to heaven.

"What's all this?" booms the author.

The Master Carpenter gruffly repeats his piece.

"Very well," growls Mr. Shakespeare to the producer. "Cut it out. I don't care. I was thinking of the fool public. Let 'em use their bally imagination instead, blast them."

The Master Carpenter rumblingly removes himself.

"Go on," says Mr. Burbage wearily to Prospero.

Prospero proceeds :

"But this rough magic
I here abjure ; and when I have required——"

The author suddenly explodes.

"Burbage, my friend, if you can't get me anything better than a dummy with tonsilitis to speak my lines I cancel everything ! Everything ! You, Sir—what's your name—has it ever occurred to you that a magician giving up his art is nothing like a consumptive washer-

woman knitting a muffler? What? It has? Then why the blazes, Sir——”

“Mine,” says Miss Eglantine to her friend, “is looped up at the waist with passementerie and finished in old gold. The sleeves are cut full and edged with brocaded ruching, and the bod——”

“That’ll do,” says the producer wearily to Prospero. “Now, then—No. I don’t want the table now. Take it away. Take it AWAY! Principals for the chess scene! Ferdinand!”

“Here,” says the *jeune premier* languidly.

“Where’s Miranda?” says the producer. “Where’s—What? Yes, I *know* I wanted the table just *now*, but I *don’t* want it now. Take it AWAY, DO YOU HEAR?”

The author prods him with his stick.

“I want the proper sea effects in Act I,” he says austere. “The sea must be visible over the ship’s side, and I don’t want to see the supers’ legs. The ship is a caravel of the time of Henry V, and I want the properly emblazoned shields on the poop. One of them must bear the device of Sir Raoul de Reville, which is three mullets proper on a field——”

“Yes, yes,” says the producer huskily. “Now, then. Principals for the—Where’s that table? Where’s that TABLE? When I say I want a table I *want* to see a table HERE,

AT ONCE. Am I to stand here asking for a table all DAY? Where's——?"

A heated messenger rushes up.

"WHAT?" bellows the producer. "She's gone? Who's gone? Speak up! Who the devil gave any member of this cast permission—What? *Who?*"

He gulps three times, and a sickly grin spreads over his features as he gropes for a chair and sinks into it.

"Lady Angela Wessex," he says to the author, "has a slight headache and has gone home to rest. She may be here next Tuesday."

He waves a trembling hand round the stage. Mr. Shakespeare, purple in the face, gasps and subsides into another chair, babbling incoherently. The company moves off, chattering. Rehearsal is over.

XXIX

A SHORT NOTE ON THE DRAMA

IT seems evident, from a theatrical correspondent's *exposé* in *The Daily Mail* recently, that London managers are frequently mistaken about the plays they refuse. A more discerning expert often gets a piece that has been the round of half a dozen theatres; and after the cigar-ash and the thumb-marks have been rubbed off the manuscript it is frequently read and produced with enormous success.

There are, of course, managers who grasp the potentialities of a play (especially a comedy) in a twinkling. I know one of them who reads only as far as the third page of manuscript; if by that time one of the characters has not been smacked in the eye with a jam tart or pushed off a house he rejects it on the spot, knowing the piece to be a certain frost. Equally if, on the other hand, it contains such lines as—

LADY PAMELA: Alfred! Surely that is not possible!

LORD ALFRED (*with a faint smile*): Only the impossible is possible, Pamela.

—he knows that subtlety of this sort, clever and dazzling as it may be, is not what he calls a box-office proposition. So the experienced manager stops reading it (or, in the case of a manager who cannot read, having it read to him by a secretary) at once and hurries off for a frugal bite at the Ritz.

On the other hand, there certainly are managers in London who recognise a good play when they see it, and are amenable to reason. My friend J. Willowly Poffle, the dramatist, tells me that he once took a manuscript to Mr. Hammersmith Broadway to read. The play was a poetic drama, full of exquisite melody and throbbing passion. At the end of Act I the hunted and unhappy lovers met by a ruined fountain in a Maeterlinckian forest and drank a goblet of each other's blood in the dusk. Mr. Hammersmith Broadway started visibly when Poffle came to this.

“What's this?” he said sharply.

“It is transcendental,” said J. Willowly Poffle, clearing his throat. “I have endeavoured to interpret the mystic urge of purely ethereal emotion and spiritual contacts by pure lyricism. That Tristan and Yseult stuff,” he added, “will knock 'em for a row of beans.”

The great actor-manager frowned and tapped his rosewood desk, deep in thought.

“This fountain,” he said abruptly. “How

are you going to let an audience know it's a fountain and not a hatstand ? ”

“ Programme,” said J. Willowly Poffle shortly.

Mr. Hammersmith Broadway brooded for a moment.

“ Ah,” he said with a decisive gesture. “ I’ve got it. The fountain must play. How will they know it’s playing in the dusk ? We must have one of those little red and white celluloid balls dancing up and down on the jet.”

J. Willowly Poffle buried his face in his hands.

“ Let me see your script,” said Mr. Broadway peremptorily. “ H’m. Chrm ! Yes. This is how the dialogue will go.

YVAINE

Here we are safe ! O the sweet fire which burns
My fainting blood and thrills my life to madness !

AGLAVAINÉ

Lo, here the fountain where we used to meet
Still to the sky throws up the dancing ball.

YVAINE

Once, O my prince, thou wert so skilled a shot
That no one from thee bore the prize away.
What if for old time’s sake thou took’st a pot
And with thine arrow knock’dst it clean to blazes ?

“ Or words to that effect. He gets his bow at once and pots it. Shows he’s the crack shot

he's supposed to be. Then *bing*—on with the sob stuff at once. D'you get that ? ”

“ Why not,” said J. Willowly Poffle, breathing hard, “ why not let her offer him a cigar or a pair of pink vases ? ”

“ We'll think about that,” said the great Mr. Broadway slowly. “ We'll think about that. Go on.”

But my unhappy friend, with an eldritch scream, had vanished into the night.

I have a theory which came to me the other day after dipping into Mr. Arthur Waley's translation of some of the ancient *Nō* plays of Japan. It is, briefly, that the fifteenth-century Japanese theatrical manager led a practically calm and unworried life, since he was never harassed by such problems as the one I have just indicated. A playwright like Seami, for example, would call and begin to read a piece called *Snow on the Bamboos*, which opens :

TONO-I. My name is Tono-i. I live in the land of Echigo. I had a wife, but for a trifling reason I parted from her. We had two children ; the girl I sent to live with her mother at the House of the Tall Pines, but the boy, Tsukiwaka, I have here with me, to be the heir of all my fortune. Now it happens

that in pursuance of a binding vow I must be absent for a while on pilgrimage. I will now give orders for the care of Tsukiwaka my son.

It is not difficult to see the Japanese manager nodding happily, grasping the main idea of the play almost at once, and only interrupting to ask "What son?" or "Whose fortune?" or perhaps "Steady, my boy. Don't rush it."

Occasionally a manager rather slow in the uptake might shake his head and say the public would not like things kept from it, but on the whole, I expect there were few rejections. It will probably occur to you now that we ourselves have a kind of national drama which faintly echoes this admirable tradition. Listen :

SIR JASPER : Laugh, proud beauty !
Ere an hour has passed you shall weep !
Little does old Sir Ralph suspect that I
have made away with the deeds, and that
by midnight he will be homeless ! But
for my swiftness to act young Eric Vandeleur would even now be seeking the
hand of yonder girl—whereas now he,
too, must shortly face a felon's doom !
By this means the coast is clear for me
at last to marry Lady Angela and

succeed to the estate. Ha! Ha! And now to drug the wine that shall bring that young fool Wilfred Galumphley into my clutches.

No confusion here, I think. In such a play the art of old Japan joins hands with our native drama. It was (as a matter of fact) precisely when the hissing of "asides" began to go out of fashion that London managers began to be jumpy and nerve-racked, and now they hardly know what they are doing.

It would seem a good thing, for their sakes, if we got back to the big simple stuff, the old Japanese tradition. And if at the same time we carried the revival to its logical conclusion and provided each manager, when faced with the shame of an author's rebuke, with a neat little razor-bladed sword with which to disembowel himself, that might also (who knows?) be good for the Drama.

XXX

SNAGS

I THINK it was exactly a week after I had begun to live in the country that I wrote to the editor of *Wild Life* informing him that I had heard the chiff-chaff. This, indeed, was one of the amenities of country life to which I had looked forward with keen pleasure for some time, and although my friends tried to dissuade me, I was determined to seize the first opportunity of doing so.

My friends said, shaking their heads, "It will give the editor of *Wild Life* no pleasure to hear about the chiff-chaff from *you*. On the contrary, he will probably resent it keenly. Who are you to babble about the chiff-chaff to a man who probably knows more than you about it, and can look it up in *British Birds* in an instant?"

I was determined, however; and that night I wrote. To my surprise and indignation the next number of *Wild Life* did not contain my letter. I at once sat down and wrote the following note:

“ TO THE EDITOR OF ‘ WILD LIFE ’

“ SIR,—I regret to observe that a letter I wrote to you on June 12 about hearing the chiff-chaff has not appeared in your columns. I am loath to believe that it was suppressed by you for any reasons of policy or intrigue, but it does seem to me extraordinary that a letter which I wrote at the express recommendation of the President of the Royal Society (who was the first to congratulate me) should have been omitted from what I have up to now esteemed a well-conducted and well-informed journal.—Yours faithfully, etc.”

At the same time I wrote, in cleverly disguised handwriting, letters signed “Scrutator,” “Lover of Justice,” “Semper Eadem,” “Mother of Five,” and “Noli Me Tangere,” all demanding some information about the chiff-chaff; but it became obvious either (*a*) that I was fighting vested interests and that they dared not publish my letter, or (*b*) that my news of the chiff-chaff had failed to hit the popular taste. On carefully examining the next three numbers I came to the conclusion that (*b*) was correct. I therefore sent in an interesting anecdote about a wild but sagacious bat named Arthur, who lived on old shoes spread with strawberry jam, and had the satisfaction of seeing it in print directly.

The moral of all this is that even the most earnest disciples of Nature have their setbacks. It is not generally known, I think, that Mr. Wordsworth, the poet, who could extract a lesson from practically anything, had troubles of this kind in his earlier days. The *Lancet*, for example, refused to print his "Lines to a Young Lady, on her Grandfather's Recovery from Nettle-Rash"; and as for his better-known poem called "Simon Lee," which contains the beautiful lines,

Few months of life has he in store,
As he to you will tell,
For still, the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell,

everybody knows that *The Gentlewoman* rejected it in the following letter, which was lately discovered among the Whiffleham Papers :

"The editor of *The Gentlewoman* presents his compliments to Mr. Wordsworth, and begs to inform him that no female with pretensions to *gentility* could bring herself to peruse a poem in which the lower limbs of persons of the labouring classes are exposed with so libertine an indifference—to use no harsher word—to the canons of propriety, of modesty, and of that morality which is the fairest jewel in the diadem of British Womanhood."

And it is well known that *The Boxing World* returned Mr. Wordsworth's poem "The Lesser Celandine : A Lesson" with a note of such a character that I would blush to transcribe it. But did that stop Mr. Wordsworth from writing reams and reams of improving verse about clouds, daisies, cuckoos, mountains, stars, steamboats, Liberty (the goddess, not the store), eagles, and hundreds of other things ? It did not ; and my little trouble with *Wild Life* shall not stifle my kindly interest in Nature.

How truly does the poet sum up this feeling in those flowing lines in "The Journey" :

The old Man ceased ; I saw that he was moved,
For on his whiskers gleam'd the silent tear,
And as he spoke he sobbed like anything,
Heaving his aged waistcoat up and down,
And hooting like a steamboat in distress ;
Until I pluck'd a buttercup to comfort him,
At which, with fresh emotion, he resumed
" O William ! I have heard your verse compared
Unto the bleating of an aged sheep !
But never mind. Keep on as you have done,
Extract new lessons from each flow'r and herb,
Instil the fact that two and two make four,
That stitches made in time save other nine,
That rolling stones rarely amass much moss,
That grass is green and water wet and cold—
In fact, the mixture as before. And O, my Friend,
Write lots and lots of jog-trot verse like this,
Go on and on and on, and blow the rhymes.
God bless you. Where's my hat ? " The dear old Man,
Seeing my sorrow sat and wept afresh,

Until the vale resounded to our sobs,
And every hill re-echoed with the sound.
I scarce could bear to see an aged bloke
Take on so bitterly and bleat so loud,
And so, with sprightlier mien and head held high,
Observing "Grandpa ! Do not cry, I beg,"
I pushed him suddenly into the brook,
And onward took my meditative way,
Thinking of Liberty and Fortitude.

I quote from memory, and perhaps I have made a slip here and there ; but the broad idea is there. To those of us whose lives are passed in the bosom of Nature they will ever be an inspiration, and—judging from the work of one or two of the best-selling poets of the moment—a constant source of income also.

XXXI

PANEGYRIC OF A HERO

THE train, having cast me up on the little country station, hooted derisively and went away, well knowing that I was rooted there for half an hour at least, with nothing to look at but the expresses as they thundered through at regular intervals on their way to Brighton with their precious freight of Pullman cars full of stockbrokers, chorus girls, money-lenders, bookmakers, and company promoters about to snatch a breath of sea air in the Palm Court of the Cosmopole.

The little station bookstall had nothing substantial to offer except *Fowl-Breeding as a Hobby*, *The Sinister Betrothal*, *Don'ts For Chess Amateurs*, *Everyday Etiquette*, *Her One False Step*, *The Outline of History*, *A Hundred Ways With Eggs*, *Secrets of Success*, and other bromides. The clerk said he had nothing else interesting, except *Wit and Wisdom of David Lloyd George*, reduced from 7s. 6d. to three-pence. I threw a final despairing glance over the bookstall, and suddenly emitted a suppressed whoop of joy.

“On the contrary,” I said triumphantly, “you have everything!”

I picked up a cheap little pale-blue book in a whitish paper jacket and bore it tenderly away. It is a book which lives constantly by my bedside. I sometimes forget to pack it when I go away for a week-end in a strange house, and I am miserable. When I enter a house and find it there I know that I am under the roof of friends, men strong and holy, men firm and joyous, rooted in constancy, caring for all things lovely and of good report, men of sweetness and light, men perfected, men fit for companionship and laughter, men clear-eyed and faithful. I refer to *The Diary of a Nobody*, by George and Weedon Grossmith.

For many things the Victorian Era has been and is—I think justly—execrated. It was too full of complacent gentlemen in whiskers proclaiming the Millennium. It gave us the Crystal Palace and a poem by Mr. Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate, containing the lines :

O our stout, stubborn kith !
Kimberley, Ladysmith,
Mafeking, wedded with
Lucknow and Delhi !

It also gave us wax-fruit, Stainer, bustles, bastard Gothic, theatrical knights, Ruskin

(with his little scholastic cane), fancy waistcoats, *The Sorrows of Satan*, industrial areas, hand-painted tambourines, *The Yellow Book*, the Griffin at Temple Bar, German philosophy, "*Her Heart Says 'Yes,'*" and a hundred other things one would rather not think about. But let us remember in the same breath that we owe to the Victorian Era the discovery of one glorious epic and the composing of another; for it was in the Bodleian in 18—something (I forget the year, and I am far away from books) that M. Francisque Michel found the long-lost manuscript of the Song of Roland, and it was in 1892 that Mr. Charles Pooter, the hero of *The Diary of a Nobody*, burst upon the world.

There may be some otherwise excellent citizens who have not yet met Mr. Pooter. We who know and love him—and what a company we are! We include Lord Rosebery, Mr. Augustine Birrell, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, one of H.M. Ambassadors, and at least one Abbot of Benedictines, to my own knowledge—are not exclusive, uppish, or compact of snobbery, though we rightly esteem ourselves the salt of the earth. We ask (like Mr. What's-his-Name, the furniture magnate) for no references. Any friend of Pooter is our friend. When Mr. Bawl, described on the calendar as a poet, was indicted and found guilty the other day of blackmailing and violently assaulting Sir Moses

Beaufoy, the Rand millionaire, do you think it was his plea of a custom of the trade that got him off with a caution? Why, no. When the Clerk of Arraignment pronounced the formula asking the prisoner if he had anything to say before sentence was passed on him the following dialogue (which I take from the official report) ensued :

ACCUSED : My Lord, I have nothing to say, except that I wish I had hit him harder and more constantly, and sent him more insulting postcards. I most enjoyed pulling his beard till the tears came into his eyes, as the cabman did to Mr. Pooter after the East Acton Volunteer Ball.

THE JUDGE (*starting eagerly*) : Mr. Pooter slipped and banged his head on the floor on that occasion, I believe?

ACCUSED : No, my Lord. That was at the Mansion House Ball.

THE JUDGE (*with strong emotion*) : So it was. So it was. The charge is dismissed with a caution. Mr. Bawl! I shall be happy if you will dine with me to-night.

They went home to the judge's house in Eaton-square arm-in-arm. That is what the bond of a common love of Pooter does for men so widely removed in station and dignity.

What is the secret ? Mr. Birrell compares Mr. Pooter with Don Quixote. I rank him in my esteem with Roland, who fell so long ago at Roncesvalles with his great sword Durendal in his hand. There is a passage in the Song which is like a fanfare of silver trumpets, telling how the blast of the horn blown by the dying Roland echoed through the dark Pyrenean gorges and was faintly heard, leagues and leagues away, by Charlemagne spurring with the French host towards the plains of France. "*Compaing Rollanz,*" says Oliver to his friend, "*sonez de vostre cor !*" And Roland, after twice refusing, blows ; and Charlemagne turns and spurs back hot-hearted to succour the stricken champion. I turn from the scene and see another lonely, stark, heroic figure—this time on the Parade at Broadstairs. It is Mr. Charles Pooter, of Brickfield Terrace, Holloway, wearing his straw sun-helmet and his frock-coat, after his churlish offspring, Willie Lupin Pooter, has refused to be seen with him in that costume.

When I say heroic I mean heroic ; championing lost causes, like the Lord Roland dying gloriously with his face towards Spain and rendering up his knightly sword to Saint Michael of the Peril ; like Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac, when the enemy storm the parapet at the siege of Arras, standing erect in the hail

of lead and joyously declaiming his gallant swaggering rhyme :

*Ce sont les Cadets de Gascogne,
De Carbon de Castel-Jaloux !—*

I see these gigantic figures of chivalry in their blaze of dazzling light, the more glorious for failure. And by their side I see Mr. Pooter catching his 'bus to the City, with his umbrella and his top hat, his trim, slightly curling beard concealing what must be a coyly receding chin, his frock-coat and his trousers tight at the knee and loose over the boot. I see him having humiliating encounters with the butcher, the dairyman, the plumber, the painter and decorator ; being snubbed at intervals by his wife Carrie and his son Lupin ; made to look ridiculous at the Tank Theatre, Islington, at the Mansion House Ball, at the seaside, at the East Acton Volunteer Ball, in Holloway, in Peckham, and at Muswell Hill. I hear him, in what must be a dignified manner but a rather weak, high tenor voice, carefully aspirating, disapproving of billiards ; of the wearing of check suits on Sunday ; of spiritism ; of the fashionable follies (such as manicuring and draping the mantelpiece with toy frogs) of Mrs. James (of Sutton) ; of Polly Presswell, England's Particular Spark ; of amateur theatricals ; of

the cigarette-smoking of Mrs. Murray Posh. Obviously his creator loved him, and was compelled to leave him happy and contented, owning the freehold of "The Laurels," Brickfield Terrace, N.

Almost level with (or to some fastidious minds a little above) him stands Mr. Padge, that walrus-moustached, almost unearthly figure who suddenly appears half-way through the book and utters no word but "That's right"—except, indeed, at the East Acton Ball, where after a hearty supper at the unconscious Pooter's expense he drinks Carrie's health, "coupled with her worthy lord and master"; after which festivity he vanishes from the scene and is heard of no more. On that evening when we first meet Mr. Padge at "The Laurels" we also see the Irving imitations of Mr. Burwin-Fosselton; of which Mr. Pooter can best speak for himself:

"During supper Mr. Burwin-Fosselton again monopolised the conversation with his Irving talk, and both Carrie and I came to the conclusion one can have even too much imitation of Irving. After supper, Mr. Burwin-Fosselton got a little too boisterous over his Irving imitation, and suddenly seizing Gowing by the collar of his coat, dug his thumb-nail, accidentally of course, into Gowing's

neck and took a piece of flesh out. Gowing was rightly annoyed, but that man Padge, who having declined our modest supper in order that he should not lose his comfortable chair, burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter at the little misadventure. I was so annoyed at the conduct of Padge, I said : ‘ I suppose you would have laughed if he had poked Mr. Gowing’s eye out ? ’ to which Padge replied : ‘ That’s right,’ and laughed more than ever. I think perhaps the greatest surprise was when we broke up, for Mr. Burwin-Fosselton said : ‘ Good-night, Mr. Pooter. I’m glad you like the imitation. I’ll bring *the other make-up to-morrow night.*’ ”

And he does ; and Mr. Padge turns up again as well.

“ I was exasperated, and said : ‘ Mr. Padge, this is a *surprise.*’ Dear Carrie, fearing unpleasantness, said : ‘ Oh ! I suppose Mr. Padge has only come to see the other Irving make-up.’ Mr. Padge said, ‘ That’s right,’ and took the best chair again, from which he never moved the whole evening.”

Enchanting scene ! Exquisite situation ! At

the end of another exhausting evening of Irving imitations and discussions arising therefrom Mr. Pooter "very pointedly said to Mr. Burwin-Fosselton and Mr. Padge that we should be engaged to-morrow evening." Only once more does Mr. Padge appear. I strain my sad eyes for a last glimpse of him after the Volunteer Ball, but the man Padge and his moustache come no more.

As for Willie Lupin Pooter, who so unexpectedly turns out a practitioner of Big Business; Carrie Pooter, with her gift for arranging fans and Liberty bows on pictures and chimney-glasses; Mr. Gowing, with his velvet jacket and his unfortunate liability to overstep the bounds of good taste when playing "Consequences"; Mr. Cummings, "the favourite old roadster," whose continual accidents and illnesses are reported in *The Bicycle News*; Miss Daisy Mutlar, formerly the affianced of Lupin Pooter and afterwards married to Mr. Murray Posh, of Posh's One-Price Hats; Mrs. James (of Sutton), with her leaning to Society's latest fads; Mr. Hardfur Huttle, the clever writer to the American papers, and the other planets revolving round Pooter—to us who love them all they are not phantoms of the Grossmith imagination but warm, breathing, futile, half-baked, incredibly alive and endearing bone-heads, the dear companions of our travels and

the soothers of care in the black night-watches. Many of us indeed anxiously test the women we are about to love by their reactions to Mr. Padge and Mr. Pooter ; and seeing the beautiful eyes a blank and the lovely brow furrowed with inquiry we snatch the book from the girl with a low moan and hasten away for ever. . . .

A very long time ago, when I first met the Pooter company, I swore that one day I would write a Panegyric of their excellences ; and this day, having missed two trains on their account and finally caught one going in the wrong direction, seemed to me appropriate to the occasion.

XXXII

THE RAGGLE-TAGGLE GIPSIES, O

IT was from George Gumble, son of Elijah—not young George, who married Gladys Oatcake and through sheer personality rose to be senior cowman, and not the other George who has a toothbrush: “Old” George, the one with whiskers like maidenhair fern—it was from George that I learned that there were gipsies in the dingle. Whistling and rumbling sounds indicative of anger and disapproval escaped from George, but he registered no more facial emotion than a million-dollar film beauty.

In the evening I strolled past the dingle and saw the gipsies. A wisp of smoke ascended from three caravans and two mild, bronzed men were mending a piece of harness with string. A heavy, bronzed man was dreamily smoking a pipe on a step, and a stout, dark lady in black was washing something in a tub. Near by a bony horse cropped the grass, and a thin, dark lady was peeling potatoes. Peace and respectability brooded heavily over the evening scene. By comparison with this gipsy camp the annual outing of the Vergers’ Union would seem a licentious frolic.

If George Borrow had burst in on these gipsies in his usual patronising manner and begun any of his philological nonsense I think the stout lady would have put him in his place with a look within three minutes. She seemed to me exactly the lady to tackle Mr. Borrow ; as chaste and stand-offish as Isopel Berners, possessing a longer reach and a harder punch, and certainly less tolerant of Armenian verbs and imbecile pleasantries. Mr. Borrow, bouncing in with his customary assurance, would have gone flat as a punctured balloon as she straightened herself and gazed at him. I think I see him. He is red. He is ill at ease. He is floundering. His voice trails away weakly. He has come to a dead stop.

“ You buzz orf aht of it,” says a terrible voice. Mr. Borrow pulls himself together.

“ Buzz,” he says with a frown, endeavouring to regain his well-known manner. “ A word probably of Sanskrit origin, signifying to progress with celerity in a forward direction. Icelandic *bæz* : Low Dutch *bozzen* : Gaelic *n’bhuz* : High German *bizzenen* : Portuguese *buzhado* : Saxon *bozel* : Montenegrin *bzbz* : Slavonic *zbú*.”

There is no response.

“ Jer year ? ” repeats the voice. “ You buzz orf aht of it, Nosey.”

And Mr. Borrow buzzes.

I have always been baffled, when reading *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*, by the patience of the Petulengro family. They were not mild people. They were hot-blooded gipsies who went about horse-dealing and fighting and wearing earrings and telling fortunes and behaving mysteriously at fairs and inhaling the wind on the heath and generally living a free and devil-may-care life. I have seen tawny flamboyant gipsy fellows fiddling in a Balkan town, all dressed like a Lehar operetta, with flashing eyes and teeth, and able to play *czardas* in a way to draw tears from Sir Nathan McTavish, the moneylender. I imagine Mr. Petulengro and his friends to have been their blood-brothers, except for the fiddling and the fancy dress; quick, fiery lads, full of Romany prejudices. Yet (and this is what baffles me almost as much as to-morrow's murder will baffle Scotland Yard) they endured Mr. Borrow for a surprising time before old Mrs. Herne took a homicidal dislike to him and tried (with some public spirit) to poison him with a cake and finish him off with a poke in the eye from a sharp stick. This they allowed the old lady to undertake practically single-handed. I do not know why.

I said good evening to the little gathering of sidesmen and pew-openers in the dingle and

went on my way over the hill, meditating on a thousand things, and especially on two strange but well-documented cases of renunciation of the world for gipsy life. One is the case of the Scholar Gipsy round whose story Matthew Arnold has woven a poem which I may be pardoned for thinking extremely beautiful ; the other concerns the lady in the lovely old song who heard three gipsies at her door—

One sang high and the other sang low,
And the third sang bonny, bonny Biscay, O !

and ran away with them for ever, to the great scandal of the County and the futile anger of Sir George :

'Twas late at night when her lord came home,
Enquiring for his a-lady, O.
The servants say on every hand,
“ She’s gone with the raggle-taggle gipsies, O.”

As for the Scholar—a Balliol man, I imagine, though the story gives no clue—he left Oxford one summer morning in the seventeenth century and was seen in the academic grove no more.

But rumours hung about the country-side
That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,
Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied,
In hat of antique shape and cloak of grey,
The same the Gipsies wore.

Shepherds had met him on the Hurst in spring :
At some lone alehouse in the Berkshire moors,
On the warm ingle-bench the smock-frock'd boors
Had found him seated at their entering.

I fear some taint of donnishness clung to him to the last, for he admitted that he was living with the gipsies to learn their secret art and give it to the world ; that is to say, he was exploiting his friends in the damnable manner peculiar to literary men. Nevertheless the book (like Panurge's) has never been written that I know of.

I like to think that one day—a windy day in March, perhaps, with the wind ruffling the river and the water-meadows and shouting over the wide moors—the Scholar entered a little Berkshire alehouse and, calling for a pint, seated himself on the ingle-bench and fell into deep meditation ; from which he was aroused by a woman's voice such as he had not heard for many years ; a soft musical voice, the voice of a woman of breeding. And looking up he perceived a gipsy woman offering him a bunch of lavender, or clothes-pegs, or perhaps a doormat, or a tin saucepan, or some other article such as a man is likely to need most in an inn. Her skin was brown and stained with weather, but her eyes were like deep pools under a violet sky, and her hands were long and beautiful, though the nails were

roughened; and she wore a patched grey duffle cloak and carried herself like a queen. The Scholar, waking at length from his day-dream and speaking to her, discovered her to be none other than the lady who had run away from her castle with the three singing gipsies years and years before. Let us hope he stood her a pint at once.

We may imagine the things they talked about that gusty March afternoon in the alehouse, seeing nothing and caring nothing for the curious glances of the Berkshire rustics slouching in and out with sidelong glances. . . .

“Do you,” says the Scholar pensively, “ever by any chance regret . . . ?”

“Well,” she says, gazing into the fire on the broad hearth, “I don’t know. I get plenty of singing.”

There is a silence.

“Of course George is Lord-Lieutenant now,” she says, clasping her hands and looking at the flames, “I’d have liked that. I’d have had lots of silk gowns, and a new coach and six to go to Court in. Everything is very splendid at the Castle now. Only the very best scented rushes on the flags, and the floors wax-polished like glass.”

“You have been back?” says the Scholar gently.

“ I was driven from the back-door last Thursday,” she says, not moving.

A silence.

“ And you ? ” she says.

The Scholar coughs and stares at the fire.

“ I’d have been Master of Balliol by now,” he says at length.

“ Of course I *like* sleeping in the fields all the year round,” says the lady wistfully, “ and I suppose people who live in houses never really know starlight and wind and the rain in the trees, and all that sort of thing. At the Castle I had a feather bed and a maid to do my hair. I used to hate it.”

“ In my last term—*O noctes coenæque Deûm !* ” says the Scholar, breaking off with something like a stifled groan.

There is a long silence.

“ Another pint ? ” says the Scholar with a sigh.

“ No, thanks,” says the lady, sighing deeply.

She picks up her basket and goes out, drawing her cloak more closely round her ; but the Scholar lingers over his beer a long time, staring in front of him and feeling the ache of his heart. In the dingy scrap of mirror over the chimney he catches a glimpse of his shabby cloak, torn by briars and green with exposure to wild weather ; he sees his face, bearded and lined, and as brown as the face of an Indian ;

brown enough (if that were all) to go back to Balliol, where even in those days they liked a bit of colour. But . . .

“Same again,” says the Scholar at length with a heavy sigh, pulling a battered Horace from his pocket.

We leave him there.

XXXIII

A SIMPLE RECIPE

WHILE for the moment there appears to be no successor to *Oliver Cromwell*, *Mary Queen of Scots*, *Abraham Lincoln*, *Robert E. Lee*, *Henry Ford*—— No, that is wrong. I am thinking of something else. Anyway, while the stream of chronicle-plays appears to be temporarily dammed, it is not true to say that nobody else is writing any. The chronicle-drama *Mrs. Beeton*, by J. Willowly Poffle, of which I have the pleasure of presenting here a single episode, is the unaided work of an equally serious though lesser-known dramatist.

The great historical figure around whom Mr. Poffle has woven his play needs no introduction to a British audience; and though his stage may be crowded, it is with the very best people.

SCENE: *The drawing-room of LORD HYBROUGH'S house in Portland Place. Night. As the curtain rises JENNY LIND is singing*

“ Home, Sweet Home.” On a sofa HUXLEY is discussing man’s place in Nature with DARWIN ; on a settee TENNYSON is reciting “ In Memoriam ” to MRS. BROWNING, and MRS. TENNYSON is listening to BROWNING reciting “ The Ring and the Book.” By the mantelpiece RUSKIN is scowling at a hand-painted vase from Naples, and in another corner PATER is scowling at RUSKIN. A GUSHING LADY in curls sits by the piano and clasps her hands as “ Home, Sweet Home ” comes to an end.

THE GUSHING LADY : Oh, thank you ! I adore “ In the Gloaming ” !

LORD HYBROUGH (to SPORTING PEERESS) : This is Mr. Browning, the author of “ Sordello.”

SPORTING PEERESS (*slightly deaf*) : Sordello ? What’s he runnin’ in ?

Famous figures pass and repass—
MACAULAY, GLADSTONE, CAR-
LYLE, HENRY BESSEMER (*inven-*
tor of the blast furnace), LANDSEER,
GEORGE ELIOT, COBDEN, DEAN
FARRAR (*author of “ Eric ”*), JOHN
STUART MILL, MENDELSSOHN,
HALL CAINE, FLORENCE NIGHT-
INGALE, BURNE-JONES, TOSTI

(*composer of "Good-bye"*), MILLAIS, ROSSETTI and SWINBURNE, SALMON and GLUCKSTEIN, and as many more as the stage manager will stand for. LIVINGSTONE and STANLEY meet in the middle of the room.

STANLEY: Dr. Livingstone, I think?

LIVINGSTONE (*coldly*): Quite.

They turn away from each other.

LANDSEER (*to LORD HYBROUGH'S pet dog*): Here, Rover! Good fellow!

A ROMANTIC LADY: How instinctively animals know those who love and understand them!

LANDSEER (*complacently*): Yes, madam, I flatter myself——

Rover bites LANDSEER in the leg.

MACAULAY (*to GLADSTONE*): Yes. Yes. But surely every schoolboy knows who Imshi was, and who founded the Khalifate of Mhút!

They pass on.

A SEVERE GENTLEMAN (*to ROSSETTI*): Lord Boreham has been staying at Balmoral. He tells me the interior decoration is very tasteful. The wallpapers and the linoleum are of tartan patterns.

ROSSETTI (*faintly*): Splendid. Splendid.

A THEATRICAL GENTLEMAN (*who has got*

into the house somehow): Herr Mendelssohn !
Herr Mendelssohn !

MENDELSSOHN : Vat ?

THEATRICAL GENT. (*confidentially to JOHN STUART MILL*): You're a bit of a writer, aren't you ? I was just wondering if you could knock up a couple of bright lyrics which our mutual friend Mendelssohn here might put tunes to. Slap-up stuff, that's what I want. Little Polly Piper—new show at the Olympic, y'know. High kick. See what I mean ?

The great economist cannot believe his ears, and stands there petrified.

MENDELSSOHN *simply waves his hands dumbly. The THEATRICAL GENT. nods kindly at them, saying they had better think it over and let him know, and moves away gracefully to the buffet.*

A GUSHING LADY (*to DEAN FARRAR*): Oh, Mr. Dean, I *do* wish you would write another *sweet* school story ! It has done my Wilfred so much good to read *Eric* ! Last term he used to drink and drink, but now, he tells me, he prays and prays instead. I think that is so much better for a boy, don't you ? So much healthier ! And too sweet !

The Dean murmurs something polite and escapes.

AN ARTISTIC PEER (*to MILLAIS*): What I want you to do is something like this—a room with a woman lying on the carpet and a lot of cards scattered about. Near the body of the woman a man is sitting crushing a letter in his hand and staring in front of him, and another woman is weeping in another chair. The door is open and a riderless horse is seen outside, covered with foam. At the door the old butler of the house is covering his eyes with his hands. D’you see? What they call a Problem Picture. The Academy will jump at it.

MILLAIS (*glumly*): I’d rather do something more like “Bubbles.”

The room begins to fill with more and more celebrities, each easily recognisable either by his or her face and dress or by some little eccentricity. (A famous figure in Harley Street, for example, has brought a few little test-tubes with him and is going round collecting samples of celebrated blood.) LORD HYBROUGH, in order to amuse his guests, and also in order to pad the play out a bit, asks JENNY LIND to sing a couple more songs, MENDELSSOHN and TOSTI to play a duet, TENNYSON and BROWNING to recite,

HUXLEY to give a short lecture on *Oceanic Hydrozoa*, PATER to criticise the paintings of Marcus Stone, RUSKIN to read "*The Sorrows of Satan*," LIVINGSTONE to describe how he met STANLEY, MACAULAY to say a few words on the Revolution of 1688, and so forth. This will take some time, but it will not seem longer than some parts of "*Oliver Cromwell*."

When all this is over LORD HYBROUGH stands in the centre of the room and says he has a great surprise for them. He has invited a very distinguished woman writer to be present that evening—the author of a book which has gone into its tenth edition. Everybody registers interest and surprise, though MRS. HENRY WOOD (author of "*East Lynne*") and MRS. HUMPHRY WARD (author of "*Robert Elsmere*") yawn behind their gloves.

A BLEAK LADY (to a whiskered gentleman): Henry! If it is that dreadful Ouida I will have my carriage at once.

THE WHISKERED GENT.: Emma! If there is any impropriety it is my duty to be present to correct it.

MR. GLADSTONE (*to* MR. CARLYLE) : But the question may be asked, what does Liberalism stand for ? I may say without fear of contradiction that a discredited caucus——

MR. CARLYLE (*dyspeptically*) : Hmhm !

Lord HYBROUGH's butler appears at the door.

BUTLER : Mrs. Beeton.

In a general silence MRS. BEETON advances. She is a commanding figure in bombazine, with bright eyes and plump, well-shaped hands. LORD HYBROUGH hastens to welcome her. The other celebrities are practically stricken dumb, except for PATER, who has just been inspired by his well-known passage about the Monna Lisa, and is dictating it in a hoarse whisper to the President of the Royal Academy.

MRS. BEETON : How do you do ? I fear I am late.

LORD HYBROUGH : Not at all.

MRS. BEETON : I was composing a new sweet, and I dared not lay down my pen. (*Frankly, to* MR. CARLYLE) : You know what it is to

have a sudden inspiration ! This was a *soufflé*.

MR. CARLYLE *goes yellow and is led away.*

A WHISKERED PHILANTHROPIST : May one express the hope that it contains nothing calculated to foster discontent among the lower orders, and to make them dissatisfied with that state of life into which it has pleased Providence to call them ?

MRS. BEETON (*coldly*) : This is a simple little sweet composed expressly for persons with limited incomes, and may be recommended to any housewife with frugal tastes.

LORD HYBROUGH : Perhaps Mrs. Beeton will reveal the secret ? We——

He sweeps the whole room with a wide gesture.

—we are all comrades here.

MR. HALL CAINE *starts indignantly and goes home.*

MRS. BEETON (*cooly*) : It is a very unpretentious little thing. (*Closing her eyes.*) Take half a gallon of Napoleon brandy, place in a silver pan, rinse round, and throw away. Next take five pounds of cream and break into it the yolks of thirty eggs. Whisk over a slow fire and set on ice. Next take a quart of Imperial Tokay, three pounds of fine sugar, and ten lemons. Mix thoroughly, strain

through the cream mixture, and throw away. Take a dozen more eggs, beat lightly into a froth with two quarts of a good Madeira, squeeze in the juice of a pound of hothouse grapes, and pour over the residue. After standing for an hour strain the whole through a fine sieve and throw away as before. Repeat from the beginning, adding a magnum of champagne, the whites of two dozen plovers' eggs. . . .

The curtain comes down very slowly, for this is only one episode in a five-act play, and there are lots more Victorian celebrities to be worked in yet ; for the best of a chronicle play is that you can get your striking effects with hardly any trouble. In the next episode, for example, MRS. BEETON has BALFE, among others, to dinner, and he sings through the whole score of " The Bohemian Girl." As the curtain descends on the scene we have just witnessed we leave all the other celebrities glassy-eyed and dumb at the fine, stark, philanthropic, simple, frugal nature of this great Victorian woman. The play begins with MRS. BEETON'S happy girlhood and ends with her golden wedding to

MR. BEETON, *and the only eminent Victorian who does not appear in it is* MR. CHARLES PEACE.

That is all. It seems a lot, but it is (they tell me) harder to watch than to write.

XXXIV

ON WITH THE DANCE

SOME time ago I was present at a gathering which appeared to me to be a microcosm of all that is best and brightest in English country life. Several whiskered agriculturists were there, exchanging repartee with each other in a dialect racy of the soil; and ever and anon they would shade their aged eyes with their hands and gaze earnestly into the distance, as if expecting somebody. Now and again these aged men would retire and chat dumbly in groups, while a squad of maidens tripped past, prattling and laughing (I thought) a trifle shrilly, but nevertheless exquisite specimens of rustic beauty. An atmosphere of tense expectancy brooded over the whole scene, and was not entirely dispelled by the sudden arrival of a bluff and hearty gentleman who was welcomed with cheers from the whole population, and who was, I soon discovered, the Squire of the parish.

He held up his hand for silence and began to speak to us. "Boys and girls," he said with a not ungenerous emotion, "this is the happiest day of my life!"

He then told us that his only daughter was expected home that very day; that she was engaged to be married to a member of the Peerage (how everybody cheered at that!); that she was expected in the village almost at once; and that the day should be a public holiday. And almost before the renewed roaring had died away a fresh bevy of village maidens came prancing by, shading their eyes and looking backwards; and finally, when the aged agriculturists were nearly black in the face with cheering, she came—a lovely creature in a superb frock, attended by the Peer (in a silk hat) himself. I thought her beautiful, but a little supercilious. All she said was, rather fretfully :

“How nace to be back wahnce again in the deah little village wheah whance Ai was a happy gairl with may simple pleemeets !”

—and immediately burst into song. The song, I remember, was called “Oogle-Goo!” and the whole rural population knew the chorus and joined in heartily, swaying to and fro and finally prancing up and down the village street with surprising unanimity.

I watched the Squire particularly. That benevolent landowner, instead of rasping at the girl, “For Heaven’s sake, Muriel, stop making an exhibition of yourself!” was

dancing with the tenants, shaking a most efficient leg, and beaming jovially. He entered, indeed, into everything, for when the Peer, struck by a sudden idea, came forward a moment later and said to the crowd, "Girls, let's all go to Paris!" this admirable Squire was among the first to accept the invitation and led the cheering. A delightful spectacle. I wish I could remember the name of the village. For rollicking jollity it had my own village looking like a suburb of Oldham on a wet Sunday night in February.

I mentioned as much the other day to my own Squire, whose friendship I value very highly. We were walking at the time over some heavy land, followed at a little distance by a knot, or clump, of agriculturists connected with the Squire's estate.

"Be *jolly*," I said to him earnestly. "Fling a little largesse. Chuck a wench or two under the chin. Why this agricultural depression? They would soon learn to love you and raise a cheer. Honest George behind us, and Worthy William wambling along in the ditch, and Trusty Thomas here—why, I'd have them waving the old red handkerchief and rallying round me in five minutes if I were in your boots. The human touch, that's what's needed. Be-

hind all those whiskers there beat loyal hearts. Why don't you try it ? ”

He flicked his boots with his crop and sneered.

I said, “ Since I came to live here I have had agricultural problems very closely at heart ; and (if I may be permitted to say so) I am already a hot favourite with the rural population. They respect particularly my amazing grip of technical matters connected with the soil. Do you doubt me ? ”

The Squire emitted a short harsh laugh, then sneered again. At this, turning to the agriculturists behind us, I stooped suddenly and picked up a handful of soil. Inhaling its aroma deeply, then holding it to my eye, then crumbling it and examining it carefully through a glass, I let it fall, frowned, and then said in a loud voice. “ No ! Believe me, you need phosphates. The land is good-hearted, but lacks *rhythm*. Use a little antimony or basic slag for the top dressing, and mulch frequently in a clockwise direction.”

I glanced at the assembled rural persons. They were gazing at me dumbly. Their eyes were glazed and they were breathing hard. With a quick, decisive gesture I went across to a new haystack at the edge of the field. They followed me with their eyes ; their jaws had fallen. They were so dazed and all of a

miz-maze that a couple of crows flew down, perched on the hat of one aged man, and began to build a nest.

I reached the stack in three strides and, thrusting my arm deep into it, I dragged out a handful of hay, smelt it critically, placed it to my ear, tasted it thoughtfully, placed it to my ear again, crackled it with an anxious frown, and finally let it fall to the ground. Then, glaring at a very whiskered old man, I said peevishly :

“ This hay is corked.”

At this I thought they would all have fallen backwards to the ground, such was their awe. But kindly nodding to them and bidding them have no fear, I went on to join the Squire, leaving them rooted in the clay and staring at each other as if Jove himself had been among them.

“ Well ? ” I said to the Squire, when I reached him.

He had the grace to apologise.

“ Come,” I said heartily, “ we will shortly inaugurate a new era in this county. You shall be featured as the Grand Old Man. Shepherds shall pipe and ploughmen dance. Bulls shall be roasted whole in the village street. What is this sound of cheering ? Why, the Squire has returned from Lunnon. Well, boys and girls, here we are again ! (Hurrah !

Hurrah ! Hurrah !) This being my daughter's wedding-day——”

“ I haven't got a daughter,” he said shortly.

“ We'll get one from Gamfridges,” I said. “ You see the broad idea, I hope. Real English jollity. Everybody cheering like mad. Look, yonder come the villagers ! Enter a bevy of rustic beauties, sing——”

“ A bevy of *what* ? ” asked the Squire abruptly.

I told him. He gazed at me in silence, and I gazed at him.

“ One of the neighbouring villages,” I said, coughing slightly, “ might furnish a squad, anyway.”

“ And which neighbouring village,” asked the Squire with heavy sarcasm, “ occurred to you as likely to do so ? ”

I meditated for a moment, and then a name occurred to me.

“ Brighton,” I said, waving my stick and walking briskly away in the opposite direction.

XXXV

THROUGH THE KEYHOLE

“**I** THANK Heaven,” says Mr. Tattle in the comedy, “it has always been a part of my character to handle the reputation of others very tenderly indeed.” It is my privilege to announce that a volume of *Memoirs* of the late Victorian and Edwardian period, written by Emma Lady Snooper, will be shortly in the press.

Taking tea with her ladyship yesterday—for such is my easy yet respectful commerce with the great and fashionable, and in such exalted spheres does the beneficent design of Providence allow me to mingle freely from time to time—I ventured to ask her whether her book would attempt in any degree to emulate (if the word may be permitted in association with a person so highly connected) a volume of recollections published only a few days ago.

Her ladyship said it would be a damn sight spicier; a reply which moved Dean Pong (then taking tea with us) to hearty but reverent laughter.

After tea her ladyship graciously permitted me, at my earnest request (in which I was

joined with quiet fervour by the Dean), to peruse the first proofs of her Memoirs. I think I may say, with all deference, that Emma Lady Snooper's book will not only cause a sensation in Society, shake the *beau monde* to its foundations, and stagger every Chancellery in Europe, but will be most interesting. Her ladyship informs me that Mr. Blotto, her publisher, on receiving the manuscript, was so enthralled by it that loudly exclaiming "Stupendous!" "Amazing!" "Astounding!" and other words and phrases in constant use by publishers he took to his bed in a high fever of excitement and has since remained there, bouncing up and down and ejaculating "Grips!" and "Sensation!"

From my own brief perusal of the proofs I am able to say that Emma Lady Snooper combines in herself the self-effacing modesty of Mrs. Asq--th, the tact of Colonel R-p-ngt-n, the epigrammatic brilliance of Miss Eth-l M. D-ll, the fearlessness of the author of *The Red Railway Guide*, and the exquisitely compact, almost too crisp brevity of Mr. G-rv-n on Sundays. I have only to add that the book will also contain an anecdote about Sarah Bernhardt.

Her ladyship has very kindly permitted me to quote one or two stories of various celebrities she has met. Here is a good one about the Queen of Dalmatia :

“ Few European royal persons are so popular as her Majesty, and though in constant touch with State affairs and noted for the keen personal interest she takes in her people’s lives, she is universally beloved. I recollect lunching with her one day at the Platz, when a delightfully human incident occurred. In the course of his duties the wine-waiter had occasion to ask her Majesty whether she would take more Chablis. ‘ No, thank you,’ replied the Queen, laughing heartily. This ready and unaffected reply made a deep impression on all who were privileged to hear it.”

Here is an amusing story of the dear old Duchess of Buffshire, whose benevolence and charm made her a welcome figure in Edwardian society :

“ Dear Maudie Buffshire came of an American family of some antiquity. She had the instinct of the *foyer* very strongly, and I have often heard her express a yearning to go back to her old home in Tennessee. For some years she was a reigning beauty in London—a position to which her lovely complexion, of a rich dark chocolate, and her crisp black hair and rolling eyes rightly entitled her. She appreciated her slightly Southern beauty to the full, and would often remark carelessly, ‘ Handsome women are slightly sunburnt.’

“ I shall always remember a little *contretemps* at the Buffshires’ house in Grosvenor Square. Dear Maudie had the misfortune to step rather heavily on Lady Puffin’s train, tearing it clean off. I thought Ethel Puffin behaved very sweetly. Merely remarking, ‘ Thank Heaven there are no Christy Minstrels in *my* family ! ’ she lightly slapped Maudie with her fan and ordered her carriage at once.”

And here is a very spicy one about the —— of —— .

“ Everybody knew that the —— of —— (not the old ——, of course, but his eldest nephew, who married the ——) was the central figure in a terrible scandal, but only dear old —— had the nerve to mention it. —— was standing outside the —— in Pall Mall one day when little ‘ Toofer ’ Tolmondeley went up to him and said, quite innocently : ‘ Have you heard that —— is at ——’s to-day ? ’ ‘ No,’ said the —— . ‘ That is —— —— —— . ’

“ Everybody there was quite astounded at this, especially as an hour before —— had been seen in a cab with the —— —— !

“ Then dear old —— —— said hastily, ‘ It’s all right. He thinks the —— of —— was with ——, but it wasn’t. How could the —— be with —— ——, when only a minute ago I met

him with —, the — of —, and — — ?’

“ ‘Are you sure, — ?’ asked the — quickly.

“ ‘Absolutely, —,’ said — —, smiling.

“ ‘Ah,’ said the — of —, quietly lighting a cigar, ‘*that accounts for the fact that — was at — —’s with the — and the — of — five minutes before.*’

“ Nobody had guessed that he would know that ! ”

And lastly, I think, we will have the Sarah Bernhardt story.

“ I met *la grande Sarah* (as she was called) at a dinner given by the Duc de Jernersay-Quoy in his magnificent house in the Faubourg St.-Germain. The great actress was at the height of her fame, and surrounded by ambassadors, princes, and the *haut monde*, with whom she exchanged witty *ripostes* all through dinner. After dinner there was a rather painful incident. The courtly but malicious old Comte de Machin, who was one of the greatest diplomats of the Second Empire, approached Sarah and said with a significant bow : ‘ *Madame, avez-vous vu le chapeau de mon père ?* ’

“ ‘Non,’ replied Sarah quickly, biting her lip, ‘ *mais j’ai la petite plume de ma tante !* ’

“ There was a dead silence, and then everybody began talking at once. But we never

forgot this duel of personalities—least of all the Spanish Ambassador.”

I fancy these extracts will show the quality of Emma Lady Snooper’s reminiscences. Racy, daring, pungent, fearless, sparkling, frank to a degree, mordant, ruthless, but never unbecoming a person of rank, they will cause (in the happy phrase of the Rev. Boanerges Boomer) a Sensation.

With the admirable intention of keeping it out of the hands of the middle and lower orders, in whose breasts it might kindle envy and discontent, Mr. Blotto is pricing the volume at Two Guineas net ; a step on which several persons of the highest condition have already congratulated this most respectable man.

XXXVI

A BOUQUET FOR MOSCOW

“Brothers ! In the name of the British Navy, henceforth linked in indissoluble bonds of love with your own, I salute the ships of the glorious Red Fleet ! (Cheers.) Both of them. (Loud cheers.) ”—

Extract from speech by Professor Dogbody at the Annual Dinner of the Union of Superannuated Drosky-Drivers, Moscow, August 1924.

“George, why not try and shake off this awful depression ?”—
Admiral Zogitoff’s valet to Admiral Zogitoff, during the Soviet Autumn Manœuvres of 1923.

IN the midst of the national jubilation following the successful conclusion* of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, and before Mr. Ponsonby and Mr. Rakovsky have ceased kissing each other, I consider it a pleasure and a privilege to pay my little tribute to all those constructive thinkers who have brought it about ; and not only to our new Soviet friends, but also to those of our own British fellow-countrymen who (whether in speech or writing) have rallied so splendidly round them—notably Mr. Levinsky, Mr. Goldstein, Mr. Strumpff, and Mr. Hamish Mungovitch, the well-known Surrey squire, who has so successfully revived the

* Or something.

Morris and other old English dances on his estate on Contango and other holy days.

It is therefore without apology that I submit the following little romantic drama, written and dedicated by Professor Dogbody to the Red Fleet. Lovers of Tchekov, Tourgenev, Gorky, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, and other giants of the old régime will observe with pleasure that the Russian soul, so ably interpreted by the Professor, has not yet lost that careless buoyancy, that sunny optimism, that almost boisterous cheeriness which is such a feature (as they say in the Army and Navy Stores) of all that is best in Russian literature.

THE LUCK OF THE NAVY

ADMIRAL-COMRADE MURSKY.

CAPTAIN-COMRADE PSKOV.

LIEUT.-COMRADE GOTSUCHAKOFF.

CHAPLAIN-COMRADE WOPSK.

IVAN, PIOTR, FEDOR, able seamen.

The ADMIRAL'S cabin in the battleship "Trosky."
Night. The ADMIRAL writing at his table,
pausing ever and anon to throw his hands
in the air with a hopeless gesture.

ADMIRAL MURK. : Ivan !

IVAN : Yes, George ?

IVAN comes into the cabin. *He is a fine upstanding type of able seaman, hardy and breezy. He takes*

off and wipes his pince-nez as he enters.

ADMIRAL MURK. : Where is this year's Navy List ?

IVAN : I have it in my pocket, George.

He hands the ADMIRAL a pamphlet.

It is the new edition ! Three pages this year ; not counting advertisements.

ADMIRAL MURK. (*mechanically*) : Hurrah !

IVAN (*sombrely*) : George, I don't know what is coming over me. I can't seem to take any interest in the Navy.

ADMIRAL MURK. (*absently, scanning Navy List*) : I see we've got another dinghy. What did you say ?

IVAN, *who has been twisting his hands nervously, begins to cry suddenly.*

IVAN (*sobbing*) : I don't know. I'm so neurotic ! I think my soul is sick.

ADMIRAL MURK. (*soothingly*) : There, there ! Don't cry. Every sailor gets these nerve-storms.

He strokes IVAN's head.

Try and think of the Third International.

IVAN (*weeping*) : Before the Revolution, when I was a *moujik*, I used to be frightfully depressed. I think it was because the old peasants with grey whiskers always sat round beating their wives and denying God and moaning. How dismal was the Steppe ! I used to sit for hours with my head in my hands, just

being unhappy. Inside the hut my father was wearily flogging my grandmother, and my mother was lying drunk under the stove, while all my aunts were screaming from morning to night. We were all miserable, but I was the most. One day my aunt Tania came to me and said, "Look, Ivan, how grey the sky is! The wild geese are crying over the marshes, and in the hut the old women are all drunk. Are you as unhappy as I am?" I said, "Yes, aunt. I am perfectly *sick* with misery." She said angrily, "You cannot be as unhappy as I am, Ivan, for I am just going to hang myself in the wood-shed." I said, "Do not intrude your selfish pleasures on me. I am too mournful." She hanged herself that night, but nobody took any notice.

Enter Chaplain-Comrade Wopsk.

CHAPLAIN WOPSK: Good evening! The great thing is not to believe in anything!

He goes out shrugging his shoulders.

IVAN (*sobbing*): It is easy for him not to believe! He is a chaplain.

ADMIRAL MURK.: Ivan, compose yourself, I beg. Only *bourgeois* seamen give way to their nerves like this.

Enter Captain-Comrade Pskov.

IVAN: Here is Alexis! It is his fault. He spoke roughly to me!

CAPT. PSKOV: Ivan! That is not true. (*To ADMIRAL MURK.*) George, I merely said to Ivan, "Brother, would you mind belaying one moment?" He replied, "I do not think Comrade Trotsky mentioned such a thing in the Second or Third International." I said, "Ivan, be so good as to belay at once!" He replied, "No, brother, my soul is too dark, and, in addition, I am reading a deeply moving chapter of Karl Marx." He then said, "Down with the bourgeoisie!" and lay on the deck and screamed.

ADMIRAL MURK. (*sadly*): Ivan, Ivan, you are too temperamental! (*To CAPT. PSKOV.*) Leave us, Alexis! I have a busy evening. I must first comfort George, and then at 9.30 sharp the able seaman Fedor is coming in to chat about capitalism. At 9.45 Piotr is seeing me about his soul, and at 10.30 I have to go down and sit by Stepan, who has a sick headache and has threatened to hang himself.

CAPT. PSKOV (*deeply moved*): Kiss me, George.

They embrace, and CAPT. PSKOV goes out.

ADMIRAL MURK. (*glancing at the clock*): Ivan, I want you to have your cry out, like a good seaman, but I must beg you to curtail your experiences. Why not take a few sheets of

paper and a pen and be thoroughly miserable by yourself somewhere ?

IVAN : I can never be thoroughly morbid when I am alone. (*Suddenly*) George !

ADMIRAL MURK. (*sighing*) : Yes, comrade ?

IVAN (*gloomily*) : I have a confession to make. An hour ago, in my misery and hopelessness, I went below and removed the seaplug. My soul was aching so ! I screamed with depression while I did it.

ADMIRAL MURK. : That was very Russian of you, Ivan.

IVAN (*in a sing-song voice*) : We are therefore sinking slowly. It is all for the best, if there is a best. (*Dreamily*) Look at that cloud ! It is shaped like a dead body. How feverish I am ! My soul is quite dead now.

ADMIRAL MURK. *reaches for the Navy List and mechanically strikes out the name of the battleship "Trotsky."*

ADMIRAL MURK. (*suddenly*) . Happily we have never really left port.

IVAN (*screaming*) : Happily ? Happily ?

He goes into hysterics. ADMIRAL MURK., CAPT. PSKOV, LIEUT. GOT-SUCHAKOFF, CHAPLAIN WOPSK, and all the crew gather round, giving advice and stroking IVAN.

FEDOR (*to* CAPT. PSKOV) : Yes, Alexis, I

grant you that in a capitalist state property, *per se*, forms a basis——

CAPT. PSKOV (*moodily*): But surely, Fedor, an able seaman like yourself must admit the Marxian hypothesis——

The ship sinks.

XXXVII

ELEPHANTS AND A DRAMA

A RECENT visit to Paris of his Highness the Regent of Abyssinia, bearing gifts of lions, zebras, gold, and ivory, once more raises the question whether a womanly girl can accept an elephant from an Eastern potentate without seeming immodest or forward. I was luckily able to secure an opinion on this question from Miss Ella Eagerly, the talented author of *Shouts of Strengthening*, *Wayside Whisperings*, and other helpful and sustaining little works. Miss Eagerley (whose newest booklet, *Excuse My Glove!* a manual of etiquette for girls, is about to be published shortly) at once consented to give me a little message.

“Every girl” (writes Miss Eagerley) “who is in the habit of pausing and asking herself, ‘Am I really, *truly* womanly?’ will accept such a present as an elephant from an Oriental potentate only after much thought and inward searching. Were I in that position my first impulse would be to run into my little garden, where, after performing some of the exercises which I have described in my book

(published by Garble and Gushing at 3s. 6d.; or in purple velvet binding, 5s. 6d.), I should commune with my dear flowers, asking them one by one the right and modest thing for me to do.

“If only girls who are faced with some problem of daily life would do this, how much better, how much more truly *good* the world would be! I think my mignonette would whisper to me ‘Yes! Be strong! Be a True Woman! With this little gift of an elephant, worthily employed, what Joy may you not bring into the life of some aged relation, some passing stranger whose daily round would be gladdened by it; and, above all, what opportunity of strengthening and uplifting some weaker pilgrim by the wayside!’ And so I would implore any girl who receives such a gift—perhaps an elephant, perhaps a few zebras, perhaps merely a giraffe or a dromedary—to accept it in a modest, womanly manner and to employ it *worthily*. As I say in my little poem in *Shouts of Strengthening*—

“In every elephant I see
There is a message there for me!
Yes! daily, hourly strength I quaff
When gazing on the tall giraffe!”

Fire flashed from the rimless pince-nez of Miss Eagerley as she read this message to me,

and every tooth shone with earnestness and uplift.

She said, "You will stay to our little meeting this evening? Just a little preliminary tranquillity exercise, followed by one of my little addresses on woman's place in modern life. To-night I shall speak on 'Woman in the Glue and Adhesives Industry.' After that we shall have a little hearty singing, and then a little lecture by Ram Chunder Dambore, who is, as you know, a very famous Indian poet and ethical writer. Do you know his 'Dust on the Doorstep'?"

I said that I did not.

"I must read you some of his wonderful *pensées*," said Miss Eagerley, taking a small vellum-covered volume from a teak shelf surmounted by a bronze bust of Mrs. Emma Dillbody Struggles, the pioneer of expanding bodices for American deep-breathers.

I said, "I'm afraid——"

"This," said Miss Eagerley, "is typical of the genius of Ram Chunder Dambore."

She fluttered the pages, gave me a bleak look, and began to read in a high voice:

"As I walked by the river, in the dusk of evening, an old man was seated there, eating bong out of a coloured mukh. O my brother! Thou wast eating bong. And I said to my soul,

'When the rains come there is wetness, and when the sunshine comes there is heat. To and fro in the air fly the birds, and in the river many fish swim up and down. The grasses in the field—do they not grow upward? O my soul, if these things were not there would be nothing. Without something cannot be naught, and where there is not Life there is Death. In the jujar grove a maiden is singing, but she does not know.'

"Then I looked again at the old man, and lo! he was eating mud."

I said, coughing, "That is very nice. It reminds me of Carlyle."

Miss Eagerley, without replying, turned over a leaf and continued :

"The young girls came to the fountain, laughing and whispering. Into their pitchers they poured the water, and bore it away. I said to one of the young girls, 'Do you pour water in that pitcher that you may carry it home?' and she replied to me, 'Not so. I use this pitcher to comb my hair.' I said to another of the girls, 'O my sister! What do you carry in your pitcher?' and she answered me, 'Haddock's eggs.' And I said to my soul, 'O my soul, sweet is the sight of the young maidens, and in the teak-woods many elephants are at play.'

"But when I looked again the fountain was deserted, save for an old woman with a stone jar."

And I said, 'O my soul, is this not Life! What of Infinity? What of the Dust?'

"But when I turned and looked again the fountain was silent; for the old woman had fallen in."

Miss Eagerley stopped reading with a snap and closed the book. I made vague noises expressive of admiration.

She said, "He will be here in half——"

"I am so sorry," I said firmly, "I really must go. I have to be at the Regency Theatre at eight—the new expressionist play, you know. The Morbidity Players. They are frightfully serious, and only play on Sunday nights. This is a new German play, simply chock full of ethics and problems and all that—bung full of it, I assure you. I'm so sorry, but I really must. It begins at eight, but the congregation are supposed to engage in private devotions from 7.45 till service begins. Otherwise I'd have been delighted——"

She smiled a tight sort of smile, and I went home to dress. The play was called *Men and Underdogs*, from the German of Franz Tolloller, and the printed version, which I glanced at hastily in my bath, looked most impressive owing to an arrangement of the dialogue which invested the least speech with pregnant and massive meaning. The idea was to break up

the sentences into odd lengths, like free verse, beginning each line with a capital letter. For example, the opening scene :

FIRST WORKMAN :

All is ready.

The comrades are assembled in the large hall.

Our ultimatum has been given.

By to-morrow the factories will all be closed down.

The general strike will begin.

Comrades ! The people are in ferment !

To-morrow will decide the issue.

It appeared from the preface to the printed play, which I scanned while I was tying my tie, that Tolloller wrote this while in the Blitzenbombenplatz Prison in Berlin, having been sentenced during some recent Socialist riot or other. I expect the warders kept on breaking in with bread and water and he had to jump up and give three defiant cheers for something or other every time ; hence the jerkiness of his style. When I got to the Regency and saw the play there was not much more in it than that, except that when they could think of nothing ethical and sonorous to say they let off bombs and machine guns off-stage. I left the theatre with a slight headache but some sort of dazed respect for Expressionist Art ; and on thinking it over it

seems highly probable that these simple and effective devices (I mean the free verse and noise ideas) may be adopted by some of our own more serious playwrights.

My friend Azrael Murgle, the poet, indeed, tells me that he has already adapted the idea to a new play, a social and economic drama which, he thinks, will challenge any effort of the intellectual theatre in modern Europe. Though strong, however, the piece is not morbid, and does not depend for dramatic effect on explosions. The opening scene will give some idea of it.

SCENE.—*A handsome and well-appointed room is indicated. In the middle a rosewood table.*

A WOMAN and TWO MEN sit around it.

FIRST MAN :

I can't explain why,
But I don't quite like buying
Furniture
On credit.

SECOND MAN :

I have no objections
To cash transactions,
Mr. Everyman !

FIRST MAN :

But I can't——

SECOND MAN :

I quite understand.

We none of us can. That's why

We use credit !

Some men,

Who build their businesses on credit,

Fight shy of it

For building their homes !

But folks are getting over

This sort of prejudice nowadays, Mr. Every-
man.

There is a fine passage a little later, as the
play warms up :

SECOND MAN :

What can you conveniently manage,

Mr. Everyman ?

FIRST MAN :

Not more than £10 now,

And 45s. a month.

SECOND MAN :

Fine ! Now how about

Delivery ? If convenient to Mrs. Everyman,

Your furniture will be delivered

In plain motors

Two days from now !

After which the First Man has a fine pas-
sionate speech in praise of the Second Man,
and the scene closes. In the next scene, which

is closely modelled on the Tolloller method, there are semi-choruses by various groups—a Group of Furniture Removers, a Group of Motor-Drivers, a Group of Taxicab-men, and so forth. Here is an extract :

A FOREMAN :

Easy there, with
That pianner !
When I says “ To me !—— ”

GROUP OF FURNITURE REMOVERS :

Brothers !
Let us work and rejoice !
Tenderly heaving out
This exquisite sideboard, and with loving
care
Removing the wrappings which
Enfold it.

*A Pause. Three men named SMITH
slowly cross the stage, thinking
about gas.*

A NAMELESS PLUMBER :

How ennobling is labour !
There is no sight more beautiful.

GROUP OF DISEMBODIED GASFITTERS :

Brothers ! We are with you
In spirit !
Longing to share your toil,
Yearning to help.

A Pause. A dead paperhanger, with ghostly, noiseless steps, crosses the stage, gibbering.

Murgle tells me that (like Franz Tolloller) he wrote this elemental, dynamic, throbbing play shivering as with fever. It is certainly a fine piece of work, and the *intelligentsia* will probably eat it when it is produced by a Sunday night society. The piece ends on a note of quiet sorrow :

THE WOMAN :

George, why did you not choose
A chiffonier ?

Her arms hang into space with an immense helplessness. THE MAN, with a gesture of despair, sinks to the floor.

THE WOMAN (*in a far-off voice*) :

George, why did you not choose
A chiffonier ?

The Man breaks down, hiding his face behind the piano.

THE WOMAN (*as if transfigured*) :

George, why did you not choose
A chiffonier ?

THE MAN *moans softly, gnawing the carpet in the intensity of his pain. Three jobbing gardeners cross the stage, with gestures expressive of*

*having an aunt in Balham named
Mrs. Higgs.*

The stage closes.

If Tolloller's play has any advantage over this, it is that the explosions in it will keep the critics awake. But you can't have everything.

XXXVIII

MOOD IN D MINOR

AS I was sitting in my cottage—in the Blue Morning Room in the Left Wing, to be exact—early one morning this week—at seven minutes past ten on Thursday, the 18th, to be particular—staring at the cold, driving rain, the sodden fields, and the leaden sky, and feeling within me that despair and negation which the Spanish mystic calls the dark night of the soul ; as I was doing this, and cursing not only the climate but all meteorologists and Negretti and Zambra also, and all barometer manufacturers and those who make the little brass knobs on them, as well as refiners of mercury and those who make cloths for polishing the popple-valves of machines used in the manufacture of the patent foods which sustain all these kinds of men ; as I was doing all this, I say, a man burst into my cottage and said in a loud, exulting voice, “ I am going to Spain.’

I did not hear him at first, for I was searching my mind for better and blacker curses, such as the curse of Picrochole wherewith he cursed

the old mumbling hag that met him by the ford of Porthuaux and foretold that he would regain his kingdom by the coming of the Cocq-cigrues ; the curse of the monk of Battle in Sussex, uttered when the rich were scrambling and fighting for monastery lands like swine in a trough ; the *Maledictio Magna* or Great Curse of Rye, which was delivered (or rather bellowed) by Henry James on the occasion of his stepping, while in pyjamas, upon a tintack ; the curse of Job, directed on several occasions against his friends Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite ; the Festal Malediction sung on certain days in the diocese of Thélème, and said to have been founded on some observations of the Bishop of Busançay when his Lordship was kicked on the head by a mule on the road to Arques-en-Provence ; and other curses so horripilant that few men, I think, dare repeat them, but I am one of those few. My friend, perceiving me to be thus piously employed, said again in a loud and joyous voice, " I am going to Spain ! " His eyes shone. He was very happy. The rain streamed upon the windows, and the unhappy trees swayed and dripped. The drifting clouds were like grey winding-sheets around the dead sun, and far away the Downs loomed through the cold mist driving up from the sea. I contemplated the scene for a moment in silence,

and then (and not till then) with a sigh I turned to my friend and said, "You were pleased to make some observation?"

He said in a voice full of laughter and dancing joy, "I am going to Spain!"

At this I uttered a sharp cry of dismay and recoiled violently, staring at him with every appearance of fear and foreboding. He gazed at me a little dashed and crestfallen, which I was very glad to see. And then, casting about for some means of abashing, depressing, discouraging, and disheartening this fellow, I bowed my head and, looking on him earnestly but very kindly, I said, "My poor fellow! My poor fellow! I am glad you have come to me. It is not yet too late to dissuade you from this fatal enterprise. You must not go to Spain."

So saying I uttered another loud cry of alarm; and then, speaking in urgent and hurried tones, often rising to a shrill scream which rang in the rafters, I addressed him as follows: "Do not go to Spain. Set no foot in Aragon. Avoid Catalonia. Shun the two Castiles. Andalusia is no place for you, and in Estremadura you will certainly meet a doom. I, who know and love that country, counsel you not to attempt this journey.

"You may say you are simply going to spend half an hour or so in Spain in order to

be able to write authoritatively about the manners and customs of that country, its religion and polity, history, geography, aspirations, economic and military problems, races, and outlook, past, present, and future. You may say that a short time ago Mr. What's-his-name, the Great Novelist, did so. You know what the Ambassador said about *him*. I beg you *very earnestly* not to go to Spain."

I paused, and resumed in a deeper voice : "Consider what befalls men like you who rashly, and without weighing the significance of their action, rush heedlessly to Spain. I knew a man who was in this way bitten by a zebra. I beg you not to go."

"How the——" began my friend impatiently.

I said in a firm voice : "On the very eve of his journey, exulting in his frantic resolve, he went into the snake-house at the Zoo ; and issuing thence, defiantly rehearsing his determination, he was very damnably bitten by a zebra in the zebra compound ; a warning to all such. Another man I knew (but he was a Low Churchman) was on his way to Spain when he was knocked down by a taxicab at Victoria and found himself, hours later, in the Cosmopole at Brighton. The result was that he had to have a wooden leg, and the same night a telegram reached him saying that his aunt in Cheltenham was suffering from the bots ; so

he took to accountancy, and is now, I believe, an Oddfellow.

“ I need not recall to your shrinking memory Epistemon of Delos, who madly setting out for Spain in defiance of the gods was shipwrecked and devoured by flatfish, so that ever afterwards lovers of flatfish along those coasts were wont to say, smacking their lips, ‘ Ah ! That was in Epistemon’s year ! ’ ; nor yet the *Sieur Gilles de Rhizotome*, whose nose grew as long and droning as a *Lincolnshire bagpipe* ; nor *Faustus of Mainz*, who had got as far as *Fuenterrabia* before the Devil missed him and came bouncing and gambolling after him in the disguise of an old *Westphalian cheesewife* without a face ; but he confessed to a *Dominican* in time and died safe. Shall I recall *Mynheer Rabanius of Scheveningen* ? Or *Master Ponocrates Noggin of Walsingham*, in the county of *Kent* ? Or old *Torre Torresen* the *Scandinavian poet*, who was so damnably beset by trolls ? All these desired to go to Spain, but being warned persisted, and so good-bye to them. Other and lesser men rashly going to Spain have found themselves — How do you propose to travel when you reach that country, which I entreat you not to do ? ”

He said rather depressedly that he had thought of walking from the frontier down the valley of the *Aragon* into the sunshine,

there striking a train under the mountains that would take him to the great cities of the south. On hearing this I buried my face in my hands and sat there, while the rain drove against the panes and the wind roared in the chimney, sending puffs of stinging wood-smoke from the fire. Finally I raised my head and said very slowly: "Is it possible? Is it possible? Do you not know of the terror of that journey? I fear you will never return, or, if you do, you will be a mere ghost and simulacrum of a man.

"Have you never realised that the best you can look forward to is to be drowned with rain and deafened by thunder and blinded by lightning and maimed for life by falling over huge rocks on to sharp stony crags beneath—that is, indeed, if you are not sent raving mad by sunstroke and swept away and frozen to death by icy torrents and shot in ten places by frontier guards and gnawed by wolves and tortured by cramps and led astray by demons and crazed by fright? You will certainly go mad at once with terror when the waters in those hills begin their devilish chuckling at midnight, their whispering and clucking and sniggering and guffawing and babbling and muttering and chattering and sputtering and mocking at you. Beware then of the trees which look like men! Beware of the rocks

which vanish in smoke, amid the laughter of devils ! Much your hat which you bought in Bond Street will avail you in that hour ! You will certainly be distraught with fear before the dawn, and I shall be surprised if you do not take the wrong path and wander about those hills for ever, gibbering and mowing, with bits of grass in your hair. They may never find you till your bones are bleached and some shepherd or mountain peasant stumbles over them ; and I doubt even then whether he will carry your bones down to the village where they may be sprinkled and assoiled by the priest and decently buried, to the comfort of your whimpering soul. Far more likely that he will give them a great hearty kick and so hoof them over the precipice with a grunt of '*Arré !*' which is the cry given by muleteers when they would urge their stockish mules to greater effort ! In that case you will certainly lose your soul and be damned, and no less if you survive—which will be a terrible thing for you, I may tell you. People will point at you as you go slinking down the shady side of Pall Mall. 'Look,' they will say, 'that is Henry Gudgeon, the well-known Conservative. He has no soul, you know. What an evil face !'

"This," I said reasonably, summing up, "is some indication of what will infallibly happen to you if you are so mad, so headstrong, as to

go to Spain in the face of these warnings which I have conceived it my sacred duty to give you. I feel it in my very bones that you are not a man who should go to Spain, and especially at this time of the year. Be sure that if you do you will never (as you fondly suppose) see the great silver censer that swings before St. James's tomb in Santiago de Compostela, nor the lovely Lonja in Valencia, nor the muleteers drinking in the Fonda of the Moon, nor will you hear the nightingale in the moon-drenched gardens of Aranjuez (if indeed nightingales still sing there; anyhow you will never see the new wireless station), nor can you hope to hear the Mass sung to Eslava's music on a great feast in Seville Cathedral; nor indeed see, hear, touch, handle, admire, enjoy, revere, or receive any of the magic and the glory of Spain. Even if (as is hardly likely)," I said dubiously, "you were able to struggle thus far from the frontier, of what use are these things to a half-dead and maddened imbecile with no legs, a damned soul, and a terrible cold in the head—as you will be?"

The wind blew in sharper gusts, and the rain drummed against the window. I contemplated him for some time in silence, shaking my head with grave foreboding, and gloating. All the gusto and heartiness had gone out of the man. He was as mute as a fish, as flat as a burst wine-

skin, as despondent as a Liberal Whip, as deplorable as a New Year knight.

"I don't think I shall go, then," he said, gazing at the rain. He sighed deeply and added, "I really came to ask you to come with me and arrange everyth——"

"Say no more," I said instantly, leaping from my chair with a loud whoop. "Say no more. What a jolly day! God bless Negretti! Three cheers for Zambra! Why so glum? Where's my hat? When do we start? Why this moodiness? Throw me that time-table. Be bright! Give me a pen. Don't cry. Mother'll make it better. What lovely rain! We get a couple of hours in Paris. Where are the matches? What's the time? It's the finest walk in Europe over the What-d'you-call-it—the Somport—into Spain—the one I told you about just now. Why don't you laugh?"

I was still dancing when he went away.

XXXIX

FALSE DAWN

TWENTY-FIVE plays await the scrutiny of Mr. Basil Dean, the theatrical and electrical-lighting magnate, on his return from America. From these Mr. Dean will select the prize play in the Reandean Play Competition. In the meantime I am able to announce that the prize offered by Mr. Carlo Mauributt for a new musical comedy libretto is withheld until further notice. My own position with regard to this unfortunate occurrence is rather delicate, and I feel that some public statement is necessary.

The facts are that some months ago Mr. Mauributt told me that he wanted to put on a new musical comedy, and asked me if I knew anyone who could furnish him with a libretto and lyrics. "I want something *new* and something *good*, dear boy," said Mr. Mauributt to me. "Bright, snappy stuff, full of punch and zip. Do you happen to know of anybody?"

I meditated deeply, and then I said to Mr. Mauributt, "I believe I do." I mentioned two names. "They're both clever," I added,

“and their stuff is very bright and amusing. They’d collaborate very well.”

“Never heard of them, dear boy,” said Mr. Mauributt, scribbling on a pad at his elbow. “However, if you say so——”

He rang for a secretary and dictated two short letters, one to the prospective librettist and one to the prospective lyric-writer; after which he went to Deauville for a rest. I did not meet him again until last Friday, when he rang me up and asked me to come round to his palatial suite at the Platz. He seemed worried and irritable, and chewed his cigar and spoke jerkily. He came to the point at once.

“Those two men you suggested to me,” he began. “What were their names? Harvey and Houston?”

“Hardy,” I said. “Thomas Hardy. And A. E. Housman. What about them?”

He said angrily. “They never replied to my letters, though I’d have offered them tip-top terms for unknown men. I told ’em both that I wanted—wait a minute.”

He rang for his secretary and demanded the copies of both letters. The secretary opened a drawer in a marqueterie bureau, temp. Louis XV, and took out a file.

“This is what I wrote,” said Mr. Mauributt curtly, handing the letters to me and lighting a fresh cigar.

I glanced at them. The first read :

“ALCAZAR THEATRE, W.

“T. HARDY, ESQ.

“DEAR SIR,

“I require a musical-comedy libretto, and I am informed that you are able to supply me with the sort of thing I want. It must be first-rate stuff, full of bright and amusing lines, with topical gags if necessary, and of course a strong love-interest. The word ‘Girl’ should appear in the title, if possible. If you think you can do this I shall be pleased to give you an early appointment to talk it over with me.

“Yours faithfully,

“CARLO MAURIBUTT.

“*This letter in no way constitutes a contract.*”

The second read :

“ALCAZAR THEATRE, W.

“E. A. HOUSMAN, ESQ.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am informed that you are a writer of lyrics. I should be glad if you would communicate with me *re* a new musical show I am considering for this Theatre. If you can supply me with a few specimen lyrics, which should be smart, snappy, and amusing, with plenty of ‘go’ in them, I shall be happy to

consider them with a view to business. An early reply is requested.

“Faithfully yours,

“CARLO MAURIBUTT.

“*This letter in no way constitutes a contract.*”

I handed the letters back.

“They didn’t reply,” I said musingly.
“Strange. Strange.”

“No, they didn’t,” said Mr. Mauributt irritably, blowing a cloud of smoke.

“Perhaps it’s just nerves,” I said suddenly.
“Unknown men, you know. Great London manager. Perhaps even now they don’t realise they’ve got their big chance. Dear me.”

“What I wanted to see you for,” said Mr. Mauributt, “was this. I’ve had a script sent me I’d like you to look at. It might be from them, because I didn’t ask anybody else. Anyhow,” said Mr. Mauributt bitterly, opening a drawer in the Hepplewhite table at which he sat, “it won’t do for me. It’s not snappy enough. It lacks punch.”

“Tck, tck,” I said sympathetically. “I’m so sorry. I thought they’d be admirable, and I was going to suggest another man for the additional numbers—a man called Webb. Sidney Webb. He has written a great deal. You’d like his stuff. It’s gay and amusing without being licentious.”

Mr. Mauributt grunted and handed me a thick sheaf of script. The first page bore the title :

“ A SHROPSHIRE LASS ”

A MUSICAL COMEDY

I will give a brief synopsis of the main plot, ignoring the sub-plot and giving only the first lines of the principal musical numbers :

ACT I. A farm near Kingsbere, Dorset. Opening chorus of rustics, milkmaids, guests at the Hall, etc. :

Full dreary drips the phasmal rain !
The God-curst sun has high upclomb ;
We strive to shout a “ Welcome Home ! ”
And mask our ghastful, moiling pain
(etc.).

Entry of Bess, a pretty milkmaid, secretly betrothed to George, the Squire’s only son. Entry of Squire. Cheers. Squire announces George’s engagement to Lady Pamela, a guest. Entry of George.

BESS : “ But you have plighted your troth to me ! ” George (*sneering*) : “ Do you think *you* could ever reign as mistress at the Hall—you, a mere country milkmaid ? ” Bess steps forward and knifes George. Surprise of rural mob. Duet (Bess and Squire) :

In the blind grip of urgeful Doom,
Blasted and blinded in the toils
(etc.).

Bess expelled with contumely from the farm.
Song and dance (Bess and rustics) :

The lads I loved in Mellstock
Lie clammy in the clay
(etc.).

Tableau and curtain.

ACT II. A woodland glade near Wenlock
Edge, in Shropshire. Bess tending sheep.
Song :

On Corndon Hill in summer
A lad may slug his mate ;
Though nothing may seem rummer,
It is the hand of Fate
(etc.).

Entry of Dick, a shepherd, Bess's lover. She
spurns him. Dick (*recoiling*) : " Thee dasn't
love Oi ? Whoy, dang 'ee, this be martial bitter
tidings, and du set me all of a miz-maze ! 'Tis
surely tarble," etc. He declares his intention
of enlisting. Entry of squad of Lancers.
Chorus and dance :

A soldier of the Queen, my lad—
A bullet through the bean, my lad—
A foreign grave is green, my lad—
So who would not sleep with the brave ?
(etc.).

Entry of Hal, a cowman, in love with Bess.
Angry words. Dick and Hal fight with reaping-
hooks. Both are killed. Entry of Farmer
Mangle. Mangle : " Whoy ! Boäth on 'em

daïd ! 'T'es plain they be boäth Shropshire lads, dang me ! " Song :

When lads were home from Bredon,
I'd take my knife and go,
I'd know that I should need 'un,
Before the sun was low
(etc.).

Entry of Squire and guests. Squire denounces Bess. Squire : " Dismiss that seeming shepherdess ! She is not the simple wench she seems, but a milkmaid—and a murderess ! " Farmer Mangle dismisses her. Chorus of vergers and sextons :

Loveliest of trees, the cypress now
Rattles his dank funereal bough
And stands among the tombs in rows
Shudd'ring when the East wind blows
(etc.).

Lord Percy, a guest, defends Bess. " Only a milkmaid, maybe—ay, but as innocent as yonder buttercup ! She shall not go ! " Confusion. Uproar. Another guest, the Earl of Wrekin, relieves tense situation by inviting entire company to Monte Carlo. Quartet (Bess, the Earl, Squire, and Farmer Mangle) :

Under a Riviera moon
A lad may hang himself as soon :
One may be dismal, so to speak, in
Cap d'Antibes as round the Wrekin
(etc.).

Dance and curtain.

ACT III. The terrace of the Hôtel Magnifique, at Monte Carlo. Bess, surrounded by guests, waiters, flower-girls, croupiers, officers, commissionaires, couriers, etc. Song and dance, with chorus :

I'm goin' back to Ludlow Town,
I'm goin' back to Ludlow Town,
I'll jazz round Wem
For a bit *pro tem.*,
And on Wenlock Edge when the sun goes down ;
Say, that clay.
Gets me gay
(etc.).

Entry of Squire and guests from the Hall. Squire recognises Bess and denounces her. "That woman is an impostor ! She is not the Dalmatian princess she pretends to be, but a milkmaid—and a murderess !" Entry of Farmer Mangle. Song :

In Shropshire agriculture
So closely is allied,
With hanging and sepulture
We feel a modest pride
(etc.).

Entry of gendarmes to arrest Bess. Squire (*sneering*) : "So this is the end. You will hang in Shrewsbury Gaol—like any other Shropshire lass !" Sudden entry of Squire's son George. "Stop ! Release that girl ! I am not dead ! She is innocent of my murder ! By Heaven,

you shall not lay a finger on her dear head ! I Love Her ! ” Statement by Earl of Wrekin : “ I can keep silent no longer ! Child ! You are my daughter ! ” General rejoicings. Final chorus and dance :

O, many a roselipt maiden,
With eyes and hair of gold,
Lies in the churchyard laden
With tons and tons of mould !
And many a lusty lad, too,
Untimely bites the dust
Simply because he had to,
As every lover must !
Tra la tra la tra la tra la
(etc.).

Dance, tableau, and final curtain.

I handed the script back to Mr. Mauributt. He raised his eyebrows. I raised mine. He rang for a secretary and handed him the script. The secretary raised his eyebrows. We all three raised our eyebrows. The secretary went out and closed the door.

“ What about a spot of lunch ? ” said Mr. Mauributt to me.

“ Right,” I said to Mr. Mauributt.

XL

INCIDENT ON THE RAILWAY

THE inquiry into the derailing of the 10.30 night express from London near Molton Paddocks, Worcestershire, on the night of September 13, was conducted by LIEUT.-COL. G. W. BUFFERLEY-SHUNT, of the Board of Trade, at PODDINGTON yesterday. Mr. Boomer, K.C., appeared for the Company, and Mr. Briefleigh-Bagge for the five railway trade unions concerned.

SIGNALMAN BOFFIN, who was on duty in the signal-box which controlled the place where the accident occurred, said he heard a slight crash. He remembered saying to his mate, "Look, I expect the 10.30 is derailed." He was reading a speech by Mr. Clamp at the time, and the interruption caused him to lose his place.

By MR. BOOMER : He did not go out of the box till he had finished reading the speech. It was about the handling of Sunday traffic, such as fish and actors. The accident happened at 10.48 p.m. It was 11.10 when he went down to the line, where he saw a small

crowd round a lady. The lady was gagged and tied to the line. She was a blonde, wearing an evening gown, about twenty-five. She appeared agitated, and on being ungagged exclaimed several times, "Oh! Is it too late? Is it too late?" The witness instructed the breakdown gang to lay her down by the side of the line and continue their work. The crowd then dispersed.

By MR. BRIEFLEIGH-BAGGE : The Left Luggage Office at the station was full at the time.

DRIVER WHIFFLE, who was driving the express engine, said that at about 10.46 he noticed something white lying across the track a few yards ahead. He saw it was a lady. He at once applied the brakes, and the force caused the engine's front wheels to leap the rails. The breakdown gang arrived at 11.29, and he resumed the journey at 11.35.

MR. BOOMER : You saw the lady in an evening gown lying across the track. Did you think there had been foul play ?

WITNESS : No, I thought she was just having a nap.

MR. BOOMER : Be very careful. What time was this ?

WITNESS : Ten forty-six.

MR. BOOMER : Take your time in answering. I put it to you that it was 10.47.

WITNESS : Ten forty-six.

MR. BOOMER : Very well. Have you an aunt in Gospel Oak, Mr. Whiffle ?

WITNESS : I have. Her name is Mrs. Gumming.

MR. BOOMER : Has she any vases in her front parlour ? Be careful.

WITNESS : Yes. Two blue ones, with pink roses on them, marked "A Present from Ramsgate."

MR. BOOMER : I put it to you, Mr. Whiffle—think very carefully—that *they are mauve, with pink carnations, and marked "A Present from Margate."*

WITNESS : No.

THE PRESIDENT : I take it, Mr. Boomer, that you are endeavouring to establish the witness's unreliability ?

MR. BOOMER : Yes, sir.

MR. URIAH MANGLE, a farmer, said that at about 9.30 p.m. on the evening of the accident he was walking through a stubble field abutting on the railway line when he saw a tall man dragging the body of a lady towards the track. He ordered the man off his land. The man was in evening clothes, with a black cloak and an opera hat, and was smoking a cigarette. He had a black moustache, waxed at both ends, and a red silk handkerchief in his waistcoat. When spoken to by witness, his lip curled

backwards, exposing a number of sharp white teeth.

MR. BOOMER : You say his moustache was black and waxed ?

WITNESS : It was.

MR. BOOMER : I put it to you that it was fawn-coloured and drooping.

WITNESS : No.

THE PRESIDENT : Will you tell the Court exactly what words were exchanged ?

WITNESS : I said to him, "What are you doing ?" He said, "I am going to tie this lady to the railway line in time for the 10.30 down express from London. I am doing it for revenge, and also to strike a blow at young Eric Vavasour, my bitterest enemy." I said, "You cannot do it on my land. You must go higher up the line." He replied, "Within an hour it may be discovered that it was I who forged the deeds and deceived the old Squire into welcoming me as the rightful heir." I replied, "You are trespassing on my land, and you had better go somewhere else." He said, "This girl is in my power. Once the 10.30 down express has come and gone no one can reveal my secret." I replied, "This is my land. You cannot stay here." He then went away, dragging the lady with him. I did not see him again.

THE PRESIDENT : You are sure this was the lady in this case ?

WITNESS : I think so. She was gagged, and her wrists and ankles were tied. He was dragging her along the ground by a piece of rope round her waist. As we were talking he lit a cigarette, and the light shone on her as she lay behind us. She seemed to be in some sort of excitement. Her eyes were rolling.

MR. ABIJAH HAYSEED, another farmer, also spoke to seeing the stranger dragging the lady across his land. He warned him that he was trespassing.

MR. BOOMER : I put it to you that he was not pulling or dragging the lady along the ground, but that they were walking arm-in-arm.

WITNESS : No.

GEORGE DITHERS, a churn inspector, said that at 10 p.m. he saw a tall, dark man tying a lady to the track at the level crossing, between Farmer Hayseed's field and the place of the accident. He spoke to him, and a small crowd gathered. Witness pointed out to the man a by-law of the railway company, and some discussion took place. Eventually the stranger untied the lady and dragged her away higher up the line.

MR. BOOMER : You say he dragged her up the line ?

WITNESS : Yes.

MR. BOOMER : Is it not a fact—think carefully—that he dragged her *down* the line ?

WITNESS : No.

THE PRESIDENT said that it was evident that no blame could be laid on Signalman Boffin, Mr. Dithers, or any of the railway witnesses, though it was unfortunate that Driver Whiffle, by electing to pull up, should have lost a clear thirty-seven minutes on the time-schedule for the run. The company prided themselves, quite rightly, on their excellent express services, and it was for their drivers to rally round and use every effort to maintain that high standard. The time would come when the people of England would realise that to satisfy private vengeance by binding and gagging any lady they might disapprove of and flinging her on the railway track not only reflected on their British doggedness and grit, but also seriously hampered the companies' efforts to provide a long, smooth run in record time.

The inquiry was adjourned for a week, when the President's judgment will be delivered.

XLI

TWO INGÉNUES

“**N**EANDER : Good-morrow, sifter ; this is an early visit.—I have thought, for these few days since I came home, that you are anxious about something or other. Pray, may I ask what it is ?

“**EUDOSIA** : Indeed, brother, I am,—but am almost afraid to tell you what it is.”

I want you to meet Eudisia. You will like the girl, I think. She is an enchanting little thing. I think she wears a rose-coloured Polly Peachum gown and a devastating lace mob cap, and she certainly must have glossy chestnut curls and wide, innocent blue eyes ; and though I only met her a day or two ago, I protest I am already tremendously fond of her. Consider the scrap of dialogue I have quoted and try to guess what is worrying the girl. You will probably be all wrong, I expect. Listen to the continuation of the dialogue :

“**N**EANDER : Pray, pray, *Eudisia*, what is it ?

“**EUDOSIA** : It is nothing less than to be in

some measure acquainted with the sublime science of ASTRONOMY.”

The dear little Graveairs ! I may now tell you that she and her brother are out of a book published in London in 1748, entitled *The Young Gentleman and Lady's Astronomy, familiarly explained in Ten Dialogues between NEANDER and EUDOSIA*, which I picked up over a week-end. Darling, pretty, trusting little Eudisia ! Her only function for some time is to register surprise and put meek leading questions to her brother (a complacent young prig. I can see him clearly. Freshly down from Cambridge, and not a little proud of dazzling the females), and to utter, at becoming intervals, such exclamations as “Amazing to think, that a cannon-ball would be upwards of 200 years in going from the sun to the remotest planet of the system !” and, more breathlessly, “I am lost in wonder !” and “You amaze me, —but I know you will not deceive me.” Eudisia knows her place too, and the place of her sex ; for as Neander is telling her something terrific about the sun's light she fetches a great sigh.

“EUDOSIA : I see plainly that it must be so. —Oh !——

“NEANDER : Why do you sigh, *Eudisia* ?

“EUDOSIA : Because there is not an univer-

fity for ladies as well as for gentlemen. Why, *Neander*, fhould our fex be kept in total ignorance of any fcience, which would make us as much better than we are, as it would make us wifer ? ”

And a little later, after *Neander* has demonstrated the superior advantages to the female sex of studying astronomy over gadding about to balls, routs, and the play :

“ *EUDOSIA* : But, is there no danger of our fex’s becoming too vain and proud, if they underftood thefe things as well as you do ? ”

Bless her. Is it—could it be—remotely poffible that she is pulling the lad’s silk-stockinged leg ? Hardly, I think. She is too intent on the Sublime Science. Her eyes are down-cast. I cannot fee the flighteft twitch of her rofy mouth. Anyway, bless her. We will leave her here. She is no fool. She learns more and more, and asks more and more found questions, and at the end the young gentleman from Cambridge presents her with a book on astronomy from Mr. *Cadell*’s fhop in the Strand, and a fet of mathematical instruments from Mr. *Bennet* in Crown Court, near St. *Ann*’s Church, in Soho ; and you may imagine for yourfelves the ceremonious bow and the pretty curtsey which are exchanged in the Blue Room

as he does so. Did I mention that each of these ten dialogues takes place before breakfast each day? It is so.

I took Miss Something-or-Other (I did not catch her name—it sounded like Muffin or Wibblethorpe) in to dinner a night or two later. She wore a rose-coloured sort of frock, and she had a glossy brown mop of hair and wide, innocent blue eyes. She said to me, “Rotten day it’s been, hasn’t it?”

I said, “Yes, hasn’t it? Do you know that if a body projected from the fun—I mean the sun, should continue to travel at the rate of 480 miles every hour it would reach the orbit of Mercury in 8 years 276 days; of Venus in 16 years 136 days; of the earth in 22 years 226 days; and of Saturn in 215 years 287 days?”

She said, “Yes, but why should it?”

“Why should it what?”

“Why should it be projected from the sun?”

I said thoughtfully, “That’s a question. Why should it?”

“It doesn’t seem right, does it?” she said. “I mean, supposing they called for it, and instead of saying ‘Gentlemen, the body is upstairs,’ you had to say ‘Gentlemen, the body has just shot past Mercury, and is expected

to whizz past Venus in about eight years' time.' "

"No." I said. "It doesn't sound refined. Anyhow," I added reassuringly, "we cannot tell in what times Mercury and Saturn turn round their axes, because no spots have been observed upon them, even by the best telescopes."

"I'm so glad," she said warmly.

"Glad ? "

"Yes. About the spots, I mean. Auntie Madge writes in the *Astral Girls' Weekly* : 'I saw such a nice young planet yesterday, dears, but O, how *spotty* ! One jar of Boojol brings relief.' "

Silence.

"And now," she said brightly, "tell me another screamingly funny one, will you ? "

I said, "I don't know any more about planets. Here's a good one about the moon, though. The Astronomer-Royal tells it against himself. If the moon's diameter is to the earth's diameter as 100 is to 365, and if at a point A on her orbit——"

"I know that one," she said. "You ask them to think about something beginning with T, and when they've blindfolded you and you're getting warm they ask somebody for it and you haven't got any."

I said severely, "You are thinking about

something quite different. Have you ever wondered what moves the tides to and fro ? ”

“ I always thought it was Mr. Churchill,” she said, opening her innocent blue eyes.

Silence.

“ Rotten day it’s been,” I said, “ hasn’t it ? ”

“ Rotten,” she said enthusiastically. “ Have you seen Leslie Henson—— ? ”

We got on very well after that.

XLII

VARIATIONS ON A SIMPLE THEME

THE question is often asked in the Athenæum Club "How would LE QUEUX do it?" ; "What would ETHEL do with such and such a situation?" And a mellow episcopal voice may often add "In what manner would NAT GOULD treat it?" For Literature is justly honoured in that solemn place, where even Cabinet Ministers (Conservative) may be seen on hot summer afternoons swatting flies with *The Times* Literary Supplement. The event of this year, I am informed, was the Bodger Prize Competition for an imaginative work founded on a theme suggested by a member of the Literary Circle. The theme selected was a well-known verse of English lyric poetry.

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To get a pail of water ;
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after.

We may as well reprint characteristic extracts from the winning compositions.

I

FROM "THE TEN OF SPADES"

BY W-LL-M LE QU-X.

CHAP. II

"Hist," said Gulliber quickly.

I looked round. The Maison du Coin (as Leo's famous house is known all over Europe) was filling with its usual brilliant nightly crowd—diplomats, Ambassadors, lovely women, Prime Ministers, Grand Dukes, Royalties from half over the world. But nowhere did I see the figure we had travelled so far to meet. Those to whom the activities of the international underworld are an open book do not seek their man in the usual haunts of the wealthy and fashionable; but if there is one place in Europe where their man may be found it is at the Maison du Coin in the Rue de la Plage. The only other place, except Fritz Gimbelheimer's delikatessen shop on Five Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street, New York, at the corner of Ninety-Third and Four Hundred and Twenty-Eighth, the dark and sinister *fonda* kept by Ramon Carramba near the Calle del Sapolio in San Cristobal de Larra-naga, a certain little restaurant run by Lars Larssen near the docks at Helsingfors, and Ching Lung's chop suey joint next to the

Teahouse of the Ten Thousand Wishes in Souchong, is an upper room over a vodka shop in Minsk, owned by Ivan Murkin. There the shadowy figures which flit like ghosts through Europe on their errands and set all the Chancelleries a-twitter with apprehension may be met at most hours of the day—or the night.

"Hist," said Gulliber again. I looked up sharply. A tall figure in faultless evening dress was leaning over our table, smoking a Russian cigarette and casting keen and searching glances over the gay scene from half-closed eyelids that flickered like a snake's.

"Won't you take a seat?" said Gulliber in a low voice.

The unknown did so, with a slow deliberate movement that boded ill for any who found themselves in his road. For a moment he smoked in reflective silence, only exchanging looks fraught with meaning with Gulliber.

"I met Jill de Rissola last night," he said suddenly in a low, even voice with a tinge of contemptuous amusement in it.

We jumped as if we had been shot.

"You met——" gasped Gulliber, half rising from his seat.

"*Mon ami*," said Riquette de Bleu slowly—for by now I had recognised the famous master-spy—"it is a simple story."

He blew a reflective cloud of smoke and

began to speak, his hawk-like eyes darting ever and anon around the crowded café.

"There are two places in the underworld," he said, "where you may be sure of meeting your man. One, if we except Hans Strumpff's *gasthaus* in the Pumpnickelstrasse at Gottenburg and a back room behind Hussein Ali's dope den in the Lakoum Bazaar at Qúf, in the Circassian Desert, is Mike O'Leary's doss-house in a certain street in a certain slum in Sydney. The other place, leaving out Hara Kari's stewed slug store in the Obimichi in Kyoto and a queer little slop-shop kept by a Finn named Suominen in Tsarskoe Seloe, is the Café de la Gare at Oudiable, which is only open from midnight to two a.m. and is owned by a Creole with a hare lip and one eye, known as Beri-Beri—but known under a quite different name to half the Embassies in Europe. It was not at either of these places that I met Jill, however. It was at Sardinho's restaurant in the Minhao at Lisbaho."

We exchanged a significant glance.

"She has the papers," said Riquette de Bleu in a drawling voice, lighting a fresh cigarette.

Gulliber stared at me, dumbfounded. Neither of us could speak, such was our astonishment.

"She got the papers from young Jack Bulli-

phant," said Riquette in the same calm, level tones, "during a week-end stay at Lord Bulliphant's country house last month. He did not carry them in the ordinary Embassy despatch case, for she searched every room in the house. He had them cleverly concealed in the false bottom of a wooden bucket on the Home Farm. She watched her opportunity, and it came one evening when he went up Hogsnorton Hill to draw water from the well there—as he explained to the house party. Jill followed him, and found—as she suspected—that at the top of the hill, after careful observation of the countryside, he took the papers out of the false bottom, and began to scan them hurriedly. Jill, from her hiding-place behind a molehill, saw the seal and arms of the Moldavian Embassy; and as Jack Bulliphant took out his fountain pen and began swiftly altering the tenor of the fateful despatch she leaped on him suddenly, and after a short struggle succeeded in hurling him down the steep slope. In doing so she fell herself—but she had the papers, *mes amis*! Within an hour she was on her way to Paris in the boat-train, which she had the forethought to stop near Bulliphant's place, and half an hour later young Bulliphant was picked up with a broken head and carried home. So there will be no war yet—unless we choose."

He smiled faintly, and with a meaning look at Gulliber lighted a fresh cigarette. The band was playing a dreamy Viennese waltz, and for some time we watched the gay cosmopolitan crowd in silence.

"Good evening," said a woman's voice at my elbow.

With a smothered exclamation Gulliber and I swung round and saw before us a beautiful red-lipped, bronze-eyed figure in a Paquin gown. She was inhaling a haschish cigarette with slow, lazy puffs, and her eyes gleamed with a peculiar light. Only Riquette de Bleu took no notice, but sipped his drink and swept the crowded room with his searching glance.

"Jill!" cried Gulliber hoarsely.

"*Eh bien*," she said lazily, "*Et quoi de le ?*"

"What of it?" echoed Gulliber. "Why——"

"Listen, my friend," cooed Jill de Rissola with a low musical laugh. "Listen, *mes enfants*. I will tell you how I met Henri de Riendutout, *n'est-ce pas ? Oui ? Non ? C'est les biens !*"

The languid voice with its pure Parisian accent lisped a little. Jill looked at Gulliber quizzically, blowing her smoke through her perfectly-shaped nose.

"Tell us," said Gulliber in a scarcely audible whisper.

She sat down by his side with the lazy grace

of a young panther, and for some time said nothing, gazing with half-closed eyes at a famous Ambassador who was exchanging light *persiflage* with a well-known Parisian *boulevardier*. Then, with a slow derisive smile, she began to speak.

"I first met Henri de Riendutout," she said, "in one of the three places where one is always sure of meeting the men who count in the underworld of European diplomacy and intrigue. One of these places is Mozzi's, in the Via Pozzi at Rozzi, in the Abruzzi. Another is the Café Rocócsy at Plock. Another is a little waterside drinking shop kept by a Swede named Bibsen in a side street off Liverpool Docks. Another is Ibn Ben Ibrahim's carpet factory on the road to El Mút, as you turn by the palm trees of ——"

"Yes," said Gulliber, nodding. "I know."

A flash of anger gleamed in Jill de Rissola's bronze eyes. She was not used to this, and for a moment it seemed as if she would have struck him. But after another angry glance she resumed.

"I met de Riendutout in neither of these places. I met him——"

"Yes?" gasped Gulliber.

She leaned over to him and whispered a single word. He turned pale and sank back in his chair. With a low laugh Jill de Rissola got up

and sauntered out of the Maison du Coin, nodding here and there to an Ambassador, a Grand Duke, or a gaily-bedizened Secret-Service man.

So *that* was her secret !

II

FROM "THE LAKE OF POPPIES"

BY C-NTH-A ST-CK-L-Y

Synopsis.—Jill Curzonby, a fresh, flower-like English girl with eyes like drowned pansies, comes to stay at the Rhodesian bungalow of the Barricks. Jack Barrick, a lean, silent, sunburned soldier, is being slowly poisoned by his wife Borgia, a sensuous Renaissance creature with insolent green eyes and masses of red-gold hair. Before Jill has been the Barricks' guest for a month she is warned by 'Mpopo, their native butler, not to touch the soup at dinner on Wednesdays and Fridays. She feels a strange misgiving. A sinister atmosphere hangs over the bungalow. Jack, growing day by day leaner, more silent, and more sunburned, rides every day with Jill over the Karoo, or takes her on *sjambok*-shooting expeditions. On these occasions he rarely utters a word, but Jill feels, with a strange sweet pain, that he loves her. One evening

Jack and Jill return from a long ride more silent than ever.

CHAPTER XLI

The girl leaned against the low wooden railing of the verandah, thinking, thinking. Her eyes were dark with secret dread. Was anything really wrong with Jack? She was used to his silences, but to-day he had not uttered a single word, even over their simple lunch in the shelter of a *laager*. He had merely jogged her in the ribs with his whipstock and pointed to the ham and mustard. Was anything the matter with him?

She gazed over the bleak Karroo, slowly purpling in the westering blaze of the African sun. Hardly a sound broke the silence of the evening, save the far-away *gnug-gnug* of a homing gnu, and the faint chatter of a flock of *sjamboks* flying low over the marshy *stoep*. There was a faint tinkle of glass and silver behind her. She turned swiftly. Old 'Mpopo was laying the table for dinner. The old butler's snow-white woolly head was bent low as he breathed on the forks, and as he shuffled round the table, bent nearly double, his knees kept knocking with a slow, fascinating rhythm which reminded Jill of the tom-tom in the *kraal*.

"What time is dinner, 'Mpopo?" she asked abruptly.

"*Oom tsetse, Baas,*" replied the butler in his curious whining voice.

"Has Mrs. Barrick come in yet?"

"*Oom, induna.*"

"Has she gone to dress?"

"*Nya omtse 'mnana, Tsetse.*"

The girl passed her whiplash thoughtfully between her lips. It was Borgia's habit to return from her ride at the last moment, with an inscrutable smile on her voluptuous mouth. She would sweep indolently through the bungalow and go into her room to dress, emerging long after the dinner-gong had sounded, with an insolent light in her green eyes. She would trail slowly, in the soft clinging gowns she affected, to the table, and with a single glance at her husband and Jill she would sink into her chair with a low laugh and begin eating her soup with the weary, cynical grace which was part of her.

A sudden thought came to the girl.

"'Mpopo, is the soup to-night thick or clear?" A flicker came into the old Zulu's eyes.

"*Oom bnana n'yanza beri-beri,*" he answered, shuffling slowly out of the room.

Jill closed her eyes and tried to summon up all the courage that she possessed. "Jack!"

she whispered to herself, gripping her hands tight. "Jack! Jack!"

A crooning laugh broke on her agony.

"You'll be late for dinner, won't you? You aren't even dressed! What an interesting ride you must have had to-day."

Borgia, a greenish light filtering between her half-closed eyelids, was smiling at her. The woman's beauty nearly took Jill's breath away. A shimmering gown of filmy batiste, caught at the waist with a single spray of *broderie anglaise* and draped with Nile-green *batik* on a foundation of smocked *passementerie*, clung to her lithe sensuous limbs. She looked like some splendid bronze-haired serpent ready to strike.

"You had a good ride?"

"Yes. We walked some of it."

"Where did you go?"

"Jack and I went up the hill past 'Ngongo-'Ngongo to water the horses. I'm afraid Jack had a slight accident."

"Really?" The green eyes opened slightly.

"He slipped and fell down," said Jill wearily.

"He hurt his head, I'm afraid. I slipped too, but I didn't hurt myself. Jack's not very fit, you know."

Borgia gave a low laugh of amusement and turned to the sideboard. Jill, gazing at her, saw four Sèvres cups of iced *consommé* standing

in a row. A sudden feeling of terror swept over her as she saw Borgia's pale jewelled fingers hovering over them.

"What are you doing?" The girl's voice rang out defiantly.

Borgia, with a slow smile, turned to her, lazily corking a tiny phail. It was a slim crystal thing, half-full of a bright greenish liquid.

"Poison!" Jill's voice rang out accusingly. Her eyes were blazing. She pressed her hands to her temples. She knew—now.

"Really, Miss Curzonby!"

There was mockery in the soft, lazy voice, and the green eyes were flecked with gold. On the ripe, full lips there lingered a smile which struck cold to the girl's heart.

"You are poisoning Jack!"

Borgia raised her eyebrows a fraction of an inch.

"Really? Doctor Pillinger thinks it is hay-fever. We shall really be late for dinner if you don't hurry and dress!"

She swept languidly out of the room, carrying one of the *consommé* cups in her long, delicate fingers.

Jill leaned her forehead against the lintel. The sinking sun drowned the Karroo in a sea of blood, and in the red mist the melancholy hoot of a wounded quagga made the girl start

and shiver with foreboding. Was Jack——? Was there——?

She went slowly in to dress.

III

THE STORK'S NEST

A COMPLETE SHORT STORY FROM THE SLAVO-JAZCSLOVAK OF BUNGO PIFFZL

On the fourth floor of the old house in the suburbs of Jazzcsyl lived Jýl, a plump young woman with black sparkling eyes, with her aged parents. Jýl was always laughing, and when her old father stamped screaming on her old mother's wrinkled, careworn face she would smile and say, "How beautiful is the Spring! How lovely the elder-blossom! How white the snow on Hjycszlesy!" On the floor below lived the young workman Ják, a tall handsome youth whose father had been a convict but was now caretaker of the town museum. When he met Jýl on the stairs Ják would say, "How I love your little young fat face! It is as lovely as a round new white soft Grnórkscy cheese!"; and Jýl would laugh, and Ják would laugh too and finger his knife under his blouse, for he loved her. In the old house Jýl's mother lay under the bed and never stopped screaming, and the pigs and hens ran about the place grunting and chirping

with pleasure, and Jýl would laugh and sing "How beautiful is the elder-tree!" All was sunshine in the old house; even the lean dark peasant in the basement flogged his thin weak wife with a happy smile, and the married couple from Sznórcz often stopped biting each other to sing about the Spring and the willows. Every time Ják met Jýl on the stairs he would say, "How perfect is your young white large neck!" and he longed to plunge his knife into the girl. How the sun shone! And the little white clouds sailed over the roof-tops and over the lime-trees! Jýl would laugh at them, and Ják would laugh too, and stab at anyone who happened to be passing, out of pure happiness.

One day Ják, meeting the girl on the stairs, said, "How I love your thin small little straight feet! Let us go up the hill! How I hate the nose of my aunt! It is like an old thick red hat. How beautiful the wind is on the hill, and the lilac is out! I must go and draw water for the old women. *Grzech!*" And Jýl said with a merry laugh, "Yes, we will go together! The buds are out on the plane-trees. Hurrah for the Spring!" and hand in hand they wandered out of the suburbs, past the market-gardens of Kscímse, out into the wide country, and up the hill to the spring, where Ják drew a bucket of the cold clear

water and fell to the ground, bruising his head, with Jýl sliding and falling beside him ; but all she said was “ Hark at the birds in the elder-trees ! Hurrah ! ” She tied up Ják’s wound with a shawl her aunt Tázscá had brought from the fair of Polcszónvy and they returned home. As they passed the corner of the street where they lived they heard the old house resounding with yells, and Jýl laughed and said to Ják “ Hark ! They are happy ! It is the Spring ! ” and ran indoors, but Ják took a very large knife from his blouse and stuck it into a very old man who was standing near and screaming, and when Jýl came laughing down the stairs he said gaily, “ Look, Jýl ! He has an old hairy face like a little piece of mud ! ” and as the girl stooped to look he raised his knife again.

“ How they all bleed,” thought Ják, suddenly despondent, listening to the howls of the old women in the house.

IV

FROM “ THE SECRET HILL ”

Note.—This manuscript novel bore no signature, and appears to be the joint work of two or three serious analytical novelists. It is a most unhealthy tale, and full of repressions and introspective morbidity. It is not clear

whether it is of English or American origin, but it is the sort of thing that would get a column in the heavier reviews.

In the first fourteen chapters the heroine is struggling with something which may be either the Medea-complex or an ingrowing toe-nail ; it is not quite clear which. Anyway it is very unhealthy. We will quote an extract from the scene where she has a nerve-storm about something on the farm, but it is all curiously muffled and significant, like a neurotic woman with large teeth speaking through five layers of blanket, and of course very brilliant.

XV

He came to her in the afternoon and said abruptly, " I am going to the hill."

" The hill ? "

" Yes."

She felt the dark waters rushing over her again, rushing from him to her. She heard him speaking, as it were, from within himself, from an infinite distance, and yet near, and within herself another voice was repeating drearily, " The hill. The hill. The hill. The hill. The hill." She felt as though the moment had come at last when her inmost soul shuddered and recoiled, with a dreary knowledge of what was between her and him—and yet not

between, but as it were something outside herself, something that she could see, definite and precise yet looming ever nearer and away, so that she felt herself saying, "No, No," and then, "But yes. Yes," and grappling dimly (so it seemed to her) with the tremendous urging of necessity; and so she straightened herself to receive, as it were, what might be coming, conscious—or unconscious? she could not have said—that from him to her, and back again from her to him, inevitably, almost, there passed half-felt, half-feared, wholly incomprehensible floods of beingness, great searching tides that washed in and out of her soul and back again to him and left her feeling—what? She did not yet know.

He was speaking again, more sharply.

"I am going for water. I shall take the bucket."

"The bucket?"

"Yes."

She caught her breath sharply. So this, then, was what she had been half-visualising, half fleeing from, half catching to her breast in the hope that he would, somehow, have given her of his own will something she could not formulate, even to herself, save that she felt it to be reaching out and grasping and retiring again, and, as it were, clutching at her consciousness—for so she deemed it—and

fading again into a kind of interior dullness of experience which made her ache, though she said to herself, "No, No"; but then again the reassuring return of that previous half-glimpsed permanence, the half-dim hope, as she realised it, spreading out and broadening from her to him, and narrowing and becoming more implied and constant, and concentrating finally in a crystallised and palpable imminence. . . .

"What is that paper you are tearing up?" he asked sharply.

She looked down. It was a page of *The Delphic*. Strange, she thought dully, that it should be that! It was her favourite magazine. She found in it the vague echo of her own thoughts, and often, when striving to formulate, to impel, some enveloping idea that wrapped her round oozily like warm, wet cotton-wool she had thought of writing it down—if indeed she could tear it from herself and rid herself of its soft, clinging, amorphous embrace—and sending it to the Editor in place of his own leading article.

"Will you come?" he said, more kindly, glimpsing the tremendous forces at war in her, "I am going to take the old yellow wooden bucket."

Old? Yellow? Wooden? She tried to quiet her storming nerves, to grasp the significance of what he was saying.

“ Why ? ”

“ To get water.”

Water ! She shrank back, trying to hold off, as it were, to repel, to push away, to drive out, to expel the hidden consciousnesses that rose like a wall between her and the realisation she felt surging beneath her, the purpose of her hidden aspiring, the panting urgency of the current that, so it seemed to her, pulsated and swung out and poured back and flooded her again with an unformulated dread of understating—perhaps overemphasising, perhaps sidetracking—the accumulated force of static inhibitions which bound her thought—how loosely, how inherently, with what secret values she knew not—to his.

“ You are going to the hill ? ” Her voice was quite flat and toneless now.

“ Yes.”

“ To get water ? ”

“ Yes. In the bucket.”

“ Where from ? ”

She held her breath. The answer came slowly.

“ The well.”

She heard herself repeating dully under her breath, “ The well. The well. The well. The well. The well. The well.”

“ Will you come ? ” His voice had a pleading urgent note.

“ Where ? ”

“ To the hill.”

“ What is there ? ”

“ The well. I am going to get water.”
(Water !)

“ How ? ”

He said very slowly and distinctly, “ I shall take the bucket.”

(The bucket !)

“ Now ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Why ? ”

“ To get water.”

She checked herself in the very act of saying “ What in ? ” She did not know what made her stop saying that. But rather wearily, and with a defeated sense that there were hesitations at work in her soul, trying to encompass, to envelop, to surround, to conquer, to inhabit the fastness of her comprehension, she rose and went upstairs to put on her hat.

XLIII

THE HAPPY ISLAND

IT occurs to me that some account of the queer island of Picrocholia which I discovered in a very old black-letter volume recently might interest some people at the moment. I do not think Marco Polo, or Sir John Mandevil, or any of the great travellers ever touched at Picrocholia, which lies very remote in the Raminagrobian Archipelago; but the unknown author of this old book gives some very curious and entertaining facts about the island and its inhabitants.

The Picrocholians, he says, are a robust, hearty, bluff island race, notable for their proud determination never to be slaves, though gasping and bowed to the ground with crushing taxes; but though they are forbidden by 9,756,384 severe laws, under dreadful penalties, to eat, drink, sing, dance, buy, sell, marry, or die except during certain brief fixed hours, they have never ceased to assert in loud and confident voices their conviction that Picrocholia rules the waves.

They are governed by a Council elected by

the people; that is to say, at stated times orators visit the populace and rouse it to a patriotic frenzy by means of certain formulæ agreed on between themselves; and the Picrocholians vote for the loudest. At one time the successful orator was presented with a symbolical hatchet on his election, but at the present day only the ceremonial form of words accompanying it remains: "He has his axe to grind." This is the most familiar saying in Picrocholian politics.

At the time when my unknown traveller landed in Picrocholia the island was convulsed by a political crisis. To understand the situation it is necessary to know that across the Raminagrobian Archipelago lies the large and snow-bound country of Bolscovia, whose inhabitants constantly array themselves in furs and make horrible grimaces and have a massacre every Tuesday and Friday.

At this time the Bolscovians (whose hatred of Picrocholia was violent) had recently held a Festal Week, during which no fewer than 689,463 persons were done away with, including their king and queen and large numbers of aged men, and such old ladies as could not fight. For this the Bolscovians were greatly revered by a small but compact body of sympathisers in Picrocholia.

These were called Redduns, and among their

leaders was a fierce personage named Lapgore, who was reported to wax his moustache with bear's grease and blood.

Now on the very day the traveller landed Lapgore, in order to abash and terrify the Government of Picrocholia (a perfectly good and harmless Government, and so respectable that it went everywhere and often had tea with Duchesses), had issued the following command, ukase, manifesto, or ultimatum to the Picrocholian Army :

“Soldiers ! In the name of the Great Bolshevik Revolution, I order you to lay down your arms ! Remember what Uffsk said at Minsk, Dvinsk, Pinsk, and Omsk !

“Long live Bolscovia ! Long live the Third Clause of the Fourth Subsection of the Fifth Bolscovian Manifesto !

“(Signed) LAPGORE.”

On reading this the Government of Picrocholia became seriously perturbed, for they had never dreamed that such a thing could happen in a world full of long speeches, and doves, and gloves, and aspirations, and respectability, and rose-coloured fogs. So a conclave of the Picrocholian Council was hastily summoned to consider the position, and when this and that had been urgently discussed the Presi-

dent rose and with some feeling uttered these words :

“ I never thought Ernest would do a thing like that ! ”

But the High Administrator answered glumly :

“ I’m afraid we shall have to speak harshly to him ! ”

At which several other members of the Council broke in hastily :

“ Oh, no, Henry ! He did not mean anything discourteous, I’m sure ! ”

and

“ Wilfred, I beg ! Ernest is so sensitive ! ”

But finally it was decided that the dignity of the Picrocholian Government must be upheld at all costs ; and accordingly on the next day Lapgore was summoned before the Council to receive his punishment. The streets were lined with troops, and the Council Chamber packed with an eager crowd of politicians and gentlemen of Picrocholia. As soon as Lapgore had been escorted to his position at the tribunal bar the President arose and delivered the following speech, which affected every Picrocholian who heard it to tears :

“ Ernest ! I am surprised at you ! I did not think you capable of such behaviour ! We are very indignant, as you may see by the frown

which George here is giving you at this moment. I may tell you that little Wilfred by my side urged very strongly that we should slap you, but on consideration we have decided to mitigate the punishment. You must go away and come back here next Wednesday, when you shall receive a severe censure."

The Council then adjourned, but with gloomy misgivings, fearing that they had been too strict. This feeling grew as the conclave sat on and on into the night, until finally a member rose and made this frank and fearless declaration :

" We must withdraw the charge against Ernest ! It will never do to go on with it. It will simply make Ernest dislike us, and probably he will cut us dead."

This took the Council very much aback, and at length, after a great deal of serious discussion, the President rose and said with strong emotion :

" Very well. We will inflict no further punishment on Ernest. He has suffered enough, for while he stood before the tribunal I noticed that Egbert over there gave him a simply awful look, and little William here put his tongue out at him. No doubt that will haunt him to his dying day."

The next morning the Council met again and

decided to offer Lapgore some reparation for his ordeal. And although the Picrocholian Exchequer already had a long and growing weekly list of people and countries to whom it lent increasing sums of money (for impulsive and dogged philanthropy was its darling principle), the High Administrator was the first to propose that they should immediately lend Bolscovia another 8,564,893,784,756 gold crowns, with a written apology and sincere regards.

Which was done; and immediately after decreeing this the Picrocholian Government drew up an illuminated address of congratulation and, after causing it to be framed in blood-coloured plush, presented it to Lapgore. And such was the kindness and earnest desire for everything nice of this excellent Government that the eagerly awaited acceptance by Lapgore of this unanimous tribute was signalled to the citizens of Picrocholia by the clashing of bells, the firing of guns, the setting-off of fireworks, and the proclamation of the day as a public holiday.

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That is the kind of people the Picrocholians were, according to this ancient traveller into whose book I have been dipping. How quaint! How picturesque! How deliciously naïve and sweet! Personally I don't believe a word of it.

XLIV

BLACK MAGIC

“**W**HAT do you do with tea-leaves ? ” said the girl to me suddenly. We were having tea in the long, low, oak-beamed room ; on the wide Downland hearth a fire of beech-logs glowed and sent out a faint, exquisite fragrance, and the October sun poured its pale gold through the open casement, bringing the scent of autumn and the dying leaves.

“ What do you do with tea-leaves ? ” she said.

I reflected.

“ I’ve never thought,” I said. “ I expect I inhale them. Some people use them to put in the piano. Neatly pinned together and tied with a blue silk bow they make tasty pen-wipers, and are much appreciated at Christmas. Heated in a slow oven and garnished with a little face-cream and a few toasted bootlaces they make a cheap and appetising meal for two. They may also be used for cleaning aeroplanes and gargling the throat. One or two taken in a little liquid glue relieve tight chests and remove squeaking in brown

shoes. How should I know what you do with tea-leaves? Haven't you read your *Fireside Chat* this week?"

She gazed into space for some moments in silence.

"If," I said kindly to the girl, "you asked me that to catch me off my guard and make me reveal my inhibitions—that psycho-analytical business, I mean—I may as well tell you that if you say 'tea-leaves' to me suddenly like that I reply like lightning, 'rabbits.' Any competent Freudian knows at once from that that I have a No. 3 Nero-complex, crossed with a No. 8 Columbus-repression."

"And that?" she said, yawning slightly.

"That means that my secret desire is to bite 675849 citizens (but not Sir Oswald Stoll) to death and burn down the Coliseum, but my better nature prevails, so that I believe myself to be a hard-boiled egg and am only really happy when standing on my head with a little salt. At such times you may tap me freely with eggspoons."

She stifled another yawn.

"What I really asked you for," she said, "was to find out whether you'd like your fortune told by tea-leaves. It wouldn't be too exciting for you? I learned how to do it from the lady who cleans out my studio. A Mrs. Higgins. Perhaps you have met her? No?"

You would like her. Much the same outlook as yours, I think. She accounts for hers by the fact that she fell on her head when very young."

"Divination by tea-leaves," I said thoughtfully. "A form of magic expressly condemned—for all I know—by no fewer than twenty-five Œcumenical Councils, not counting those of Ephesus and Chalcedon, and most certainly forbidden by that of Trent, if they ever heard of it, which I doubt. A very devilish and abominable thing which I cannot too formally renounce and abhor. What do I do?"

"Swish your cup round with the left hand three times, like this—*Idiot!*"

"Sorry," I said humbly. "My forearm swing, you know. They say of me at Wimbledon that I——"

"Now turn it over carefully into the saucer and leave it there."

"I think I see a leaf or two on your offside shoe," I said earnestly. "Perhaps I had better lap up what's on the floor and give a quick lick at you *en passant*. I have a very curly tongue—just like a chameleon, except that I never go blue all over when placed on the *English Review*."

"Give me the cup," she said, sighing.

I reflected.

"Can you throw a fit?" I said suddenly.

"All the best oracles used to. Try and foam lightly at the mouth. Get that Delphi feeling. They used to do it very well in the old days, I remember. Many and many's the time I've seen that girl—I forget her name. She was there when old Manlius was Consul. Such a nice refined girl, but a bit beaky—many's the time I've seen her coming all over queer when asked for a shilling prophecy. First of all she'd get a strange glazed look in her eyes, and then she'd begin gasping and frothing at the jaws and wallowing all over the place. Can you wallow? I would like a sixpenny wallow, please, and ninepennyworth of foam."

"You are going on a journey," she said abruptly, replacing her cigarette. "You will be frightfully disappointed. You are going to receive money. Not much. A little. You are going to have a surprise. A rather unpleasant one. You will lose some money. Not a little. A lot. You will get a letter from abroad. There is a woman—a dark woman——"

"Yes, yes," I said, nodding my head. "They all do. Never mind that. I am death to women. This is just another. Poor little thing! Dear, dear. Dark, too! Well, well. Go on."

"——who means you no good. She is in league with a fair man——"

“Blue eyes?” I said anxiously. “Drooping moustache? Says ‘under the circumstances’ instead of ‘in the circumstances’? Writes with a thick nib and——. No. *He* might dislike me, though I paid up last year’s like a lamb, but I can’t think that *she* is egging him on. I don’t even know her. Perhaps he tells her all his worries when he goes home. He tells her I’m a writer, and she says, ‘Yes, but what’s his *work*?’ It gets on her nerves, even when he’s reading her a cosy paragraph or two out of Schedule E after dinner, and it irritates her, and she says, ‘George, have no mercy on that man! A couple of sharp Final Notices, and then run him in.’ That must be it.”

“That’s all,” she said, yawning.

“Then,” I said briskly, taking the cup from the girl, “suppose we have a few tricks with matches. Let us have your well-known farm-yard imitations. What about a recitation of ‘Daddy’s Letter,’ which has set so many South Kensington drawing-rooms a-sob? What about a real thrill this time?”

Somebody flung a cushion and the séance then ended. By a pure coincidence most of it has happened as she said, except that rubbish about the fair man. I regard George as the touchstone of the whole business. George has not yet hounded me to prison, partly, of

course, because such nonsense as fortune-telling is too preposterously childish for a man to swallow, and partly because I sent him a cheque that same night. But the whole thing is too trivial.

THE END







